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Keeping an open mind

By Seth Kennard, JAVS Editor

Farmers have a bit of a reputation for moaning, whether it’s about the weather, their neighbours or the milk prices (which, to be fair, are worthy of a good moan). So, while on a recent EMS placement, I wasn’t surprised when a young farmer started moaning while staring at his phone as the vet was scanning his heifers. What was new with this complaint, though, was the subject. ‘Oh buddy app runnin’ slow again,’ he repeated, as if voicing the problem out loud would help it run a bit faster. Before he started verbalising his issues, I had assumed he was simply texting someone or maybe just using the phone’s notes app. Instead, I learnt he was using a herd health planning app to record all the treatments used, all those in calf and any other conditions diagnosed by the vet. When paired with the cows’ rumination activity, daily movement, time at rest and time eating (all collected by a collar) his cows had no secrets left.

I asked what had inspired him to switch to mobile-based data collection. His answer told me all I needed to know about his attitude to dairy farming: more data meant better care for the cows, better care meant more milk, which meant actually making money.

Not only was he using the latest in sensor technology, but the lighting in the sheds was sublime, and partially paid for by a grant; there was a new drainage system, built with grant funding; and a new shed was planned and the grants already applied for.

When I got a chance I asked his father, a farmer of 50 years and expert herdsman, what he thought of the app, and the new buildings, and he said he thought it was a waste of time.

So, was all this investment paying off? For sure it was. Since the son had taken over, the cows were healthier and the bank balance healthier still.

Although you don’t often stop to consider it, innovation is key to almost every aspect of our lives. Technologies that we’ve grown up with and consider normal weren’t even conceivable a few generations ago, and the products that will come to change our lives probably don’t exist yet. So although five years (or more) of toil and strife at vet school may feel like hard work and it may seem like you’re learning an awful lot, just relax. You’ve got a whole lifetime of learning and innovation to come, so enjoy the ride and keep your mind open to new ways.

Enjoy the read,

Seth

@AVS_UK_Ireland /AVS_UK_Ireland @avsukirl
AVS Congress 2018: what a weekend!

Lizzie Lamb (AVS Congress ball coordinator and Bristol final-year student)

More than 18 months of preparation came together over the weekend of February 3 and 4, when nearly 300 veterinary students gathered at Bristol vet school for AVS congress. With lectures and practicals for both clinical and preclinical students, the programme had something for everyone.

Twenty-two Bristol students helped organise the various aspects of the congress – from booking lecturers, organising the bar crawl, ordering food, arranging hosting and running the social media. I think I can speak on behalf of the rest of the organising committee when I say that we hadn’t appreciated how much work goes into a weekend like this!

There were four streams covering small animal, equine, farm and exotics, all with preclinical and clinical lectures and hands-on practicals across the weekend. Highlights included equine tendon scanning, exotic animal handling, an abattoir tour, a debate on current hot topics in the farm industry and a CPR practical, among many others.

We also had keynote speeches from TV vet Steve Leonard and recent Bristol graduate Holly Ravenhall. Both talks were informative and inspirational, and we enjoyed hearing funny anecdotes from exotic and mixed practice veterinary work.

Friday evening saw all of the delegates travelling into central Bristol for a bar crawl up Park Street. This was a great way to start to the weekend and we hope everyone enjoyed the crawling as much as we enjoyed the stewarding.

Everyone was in high spirits at the AVS ball on Saturday evening. With this being my role on the committee, I was so pleased that the evening was a success, with a three-course dinner, a performance from Bristol university big band the Hornstars, the handover of the AVS presidency to Bristol’s own Dave Charles (congratulations Dave!) and some classic cheesy music to end the evening.

Although not without its hiccups (the food order being cancelled at lunchtime on Friday, resulting in a mass exodus of committee members heading out to buy 250 pizzas and breakfast for all 300 delegates, being a prime example), the hard work of all involved was evident as Congress was pulled off without major catastrophe.

Overall, Congress 2018 was a huge success, which is down to the hard work of AVS central committee, Bristol AVS Congress organising committee, all of the speakers and the enthusiasm of all of the delegates who travelled to Bristol.

It was a really great event to have been a part of, and has definitely been one of the highlights of my final year as a vet student.
Sports Weekend – well worth the hard work

James McKeown (chair, 2017 Edinburgh Sports Weekend Committee)

‘AVS Sports Weekend.’ For many, this phrase embodies the pinnacle of raucous, carefree socialising, a crazy weekend of drinking, partying and fun. And so it was last November, as vet students from across the UK and Ireland descended on Edinburgh. For me personally, though, this Sports was particularly special, representing the culmination of 17 months of planning and hard work.

The weekend began in the usual fashion, with Friday coach journeys, this year heading north to Edinburgh. While some less hardy unis complained about the long drive (RVC ditched it entirely in favour of the train), our Scottish neighbours, Glasgow, complained that it was not long enough! All too used to long trips south, Glasgow lamented the reduced drinking time, but made up for it by kicking off their weekend in style, with a lock-in at their SU.

Whatever your views on the journey, the destination, Potterrow, was definitely worth it. ‘P-row’ is renowned in Edinburgh for its legendary Big Cheese club night – the ultimate vet night out – so it was the perfect start to an Edinburgh Sports Weekend. Dublin arrived first and, boy, did they arrive! The long voyage across the sea had clearly taken its toll on the Irish and, before long, one Dubliner was living up to their fancy dress costume. (I hope the police found the prisoner outfit as ironic as we did . . .)

As more vet schools arrived, the costumes diversified, and soon the dance floor was awash with a spectrum of outfits. From Nottingham pirates to Bristol Sulleys, not forgetting Edinburgh as the Scottish icon, Shrek, the fancy dress didn’t disappoint. The award for most niche costume inevitably went to Cambridge, whose contingent of just five students flourished as the Teletubbies, led by their rep, Noo Noo!

‘Sport’

The following morning it was off to the sports ground. Unsurprisingly, though, sport itself was thin on the ground (sorry, Liverpool). However, there was one shock: the weather! Edinburgh defied expectations, producing a rare day of sunshine. Mexican food acted as the perfect cure for all our hangovers, while the inflatable obstacle course and bucking bronco provided an equally perfect means to instigate their resurgence.

Inside the marquee, the fun continued, with a proper Scottish ceilidh followed by tunes from the Dick Vet’s premier DJ, DJ Vena Cava. By now, the whole marquee was rock-
Something to whet your appetite

Tom McGregor (Nottingham Senior Rep)

As many of you will be aware, last November around 1000 vet students descended on Edinburgh for AVS Sports Weekend. I, along with Izzie (Nottingham Junior Rep), took 100 Nottingham Pirates and, from what we can remember, we had a brilliant time! It is now our turn to host Sports Weekend and we are hoping to make it the biggest yet.

With a 25-strong committee, preparations are well underway to get Nottingham ready to host as many of you as possible. So far, we have eight bars signed up for the Saturday night crawl, showcasing the very best Nottingham has to offer; from Baa Bars, with some fun experimental chemical concoctions that will knock your socks off, to Red Bar, with its swanky décor and killer drinks deals! We have more deals than you can shake a stick at and more drinks than you can try in a week.

As far as the final venues are concerned, apparently accommodating one-and-a-half-thousand vet students in fancy dress all in one place is a tall order – who would have thought? We are making headway but, for now, we are going to have to leave some things up to your imagination. Rest assured though, wherever we end up, it will be great!

That leads me on to what Sports Weekend is really about – the sport, right? Well, whatever reason you have for showing up, we will be playing some sport at some point. We have thrown a few curve balls in to mix things up a bit, and now you’ll have to wait until November to find out what the mystery ‘sports’ are, but I’m sure you’ll give us a run for our money. We will, of course, be indulging in your usual rodeo bull, along with other inflatable goodies and what is possibly the biggest tent you have ever seen!

Some of our amazing sponsors are keen to get involved and run some competitions for you sports enthusiasts, so keep an eye on the AVS events pages. Who knows what you might win or where you may be off to?

All of us are so excited to welcome you down to our little village (try not to break it) for what will hopefully be the best, or at the very least, the biggest, AVS Sports Weekend ever. See you all in November!
The first of three: RVC’s IVSA exchange takes on Leipzig

Dylan Yaffy (3rd Year, RVC)

It may seem like ages since the RVC’s Global IVSA Exchange back in October, but for a group of 15 RVC students eager to complete phase 1 of their three-part return exchange, the wait flew by and, in January, they sought to cure their winter blues with a visit to Leipzig in Germany.

Having formed friendships with the German students back in October, even a 5:00 am trip to Stansted didn’t dampen the excitement across the group. On arrival in Berlin, our hosts welcomed us with a huge jug of mulled wine, before we made our way into the city for a day of sightseeing. Despite poor weather, our hosts guided us around the city pointing out important political and historical sights, such as the remains of the Berlin Wall and the Brandenburg Gate.

Unfortunately our tour was cut short as we had to rush off to the train station after hearing word that Storm Friedrike was playing havoc with the trains across the country. We spent the next few hours waiting for a train to Leipzig while posing as ‘disgruntled tourists’ for photographers from some local papers. It wasn’t until the following morning that we were finally on our way to where we’d be spending the next week.

Despite the train delays, we arrived with more than enough time on Friday to enjoy day 1 of the Leipzig Veterinary Congress. Think London Vet Show or Birmingham BSAVA, but mostly in German. After a day of free coffee, food and veterinary products, we made our way to Leipzig Veterinary University’s student bar to catch up with the rest of our hosts.

Following a short night’s sleep (a recurring theme of the week), we were back at the congress on Saturday for a series of talks (in English!) on equine reproduction. We also ran into some friendly RVC faces, like Holger Volk, who seemed quite surprised to see us attending Germany’s largest vet conference.

Saturday night brought us to a fancy dress party with the entire veterinary faculty, including staff and alumni.

Even a 5:00 am trip to Stansted didn’t dampen the excitement across the group

After a much-needed lie-in on Sunday morning, we received a private tour of Leipzig Zoo from one of our hosts, who has worked as a zookeeper during his time in vet school. Highlights included the ape enclosures, whose inhabitants are the subjects of ground-breaking behavioural research at Leipzig’s Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.

Sunday night was a bit more relaxed, giving us the opportunity to rest our eyes and be serenaded by the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.

Monday was our first glimpse of the Leipzig Veterinary University campus and its accompanying farm. The day was filled with practicals and lectures, including the chance to diagnose pregnancy in cattle, practise equine ultrasonography and learn about proper handling and care of marmoset monkeys. As expected, the day ended with another pub night. Starting to see the trend?

Tuesday began with a special guest lecture from the president of the European Society of Veterinary Neurology, Dr Thomas Flegel, who helped us work through a neuro case that had just been treated in the small animal hospital. After lunch, the group split, with
some deciding to nap while the others visited the Völkerschlachtdenkmal (Monument of the Battle of the Nations), which commemorates the defeat of Napoleon in Leipzig.

On returning to the university, there was one final lecture from a specialist at Leipzig’s farrier school, before we got the chance to give horse shoeing a go on our own specimens.

Tuesday night found us all scoring 0s at a local pub quiz before dancing until the early hours at another one of the student nightclubs.

The week flew by as fast as it had approached, and our final day in Leipzig was spent exploring the city and spending one last night with our hosts in their student pub. Another early morning (but on time) train to Berlin on Thursday followed by a flight back to Stansted had the fourth-year students in the group arriving right on time for their purple scrub top ceremony. For these students, the Leipzig exchange was a great segue into their first proper clinical rotations, while for the rest of us it was a much-needed break from lectures and the stress of impending exams.

It’s always nice to visit another vet school and get a feel for how different regions and cultures translate into a different curriculum and teaching style. Our hosts in Leipzig kept downplaying their school and making poor comparisons to their week at the RVC, but I think I speak for our group when I say that we were blown away by their university and student life. After an amazing week, the RVC IVSA chapter can’t wait for our next two exchanges, to Estonia (Tallinn) and Greece (Thessaly) later this spring – be sure to check out the next JAVS for more!

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Surrey welcomes some new Italian friends

Agatha Elliot (3rd Year, Surrey)

Vet students from the University of Camerino in Italy visited their peers at Surrey vet school as part of an International Veterinary Students’ Association exchange earlier this year. Across the course of five days, our group spent time exploring museums, tasting British food and experiencing student life in the UK.

We met our guests for the first time on January 30 and spent the evening getting to know everyone. The following morning, we were kindly hosted by Stocton Veterinary Centre, a visit organised by our sponsors, MediVet. We were shown around the practice and had some fantastic demonstrations of bandaging and CPR.

After our visit we wandered into town, where traditional Cornish pasties were on the menu for lunch, before taking some time to explore Guildford and show the Italians around Stag Hill campus. We rounded off the day with a few drinks in a pub together.

Day 2 of the exchange was spent at the vet school, where we showed our guests the clinical skills labs, large animal buildings and mock vet practice. We were lucky enough to enjoy a talk from guest speaker Daniel Preter from MediVet about its graduate programme. The talk was engaging and informative, and gave us food for thought about our plans after graduation.

In the afternoon, we visited the pathology building for a talk on ballistics and a guided dissection from our lecturer, Alex Stoll, who heads up the UK’s first forensic science service dedicated to combating crime against animals. We were really pleased to be able to share this unique element of the vet school with the Italian vet students, and enjoyed the dissections and learning about different wounds.

Our evening was spent enjoying cocktails and food, and catching up and unwinding after a busy couple of days.

Seeing the sights

Being so close to London is a huge benefit to studying at Surrey, so taking our guests to the city for the day was an opportunity not to be missed. We spent part of our day trip at the Natural History Museum before splitting into groups to explore Camden, Hyde Park and Baker Street. In the evening, we’d organised a night out at one of Guildford’s busiest clubs for everyone to let their hair down, and stayed out until the early hours.

Our last full day was an early start for this year’s Southern Zoological Symposium, which was hosted by the university’s Zoological Society (see p 22). Despite a number of our party suffering with hangovers, we all appreciated some fantastic talks and it was great to see the vet school buzzing with visitors from around the UK.

We spent the afternoon recovering, then met in a classic British pub for our leaving meal together. It really felt like we’d made some good friends over the previous few days, and we spent a good few hours eating, chatting and joking before we finally had to leave.

On Sunday morning, it was time to say a sad goodbye to our new friends. We sincerely hope they enjoyed their stay with us as much as we enjoyed having them here; we can’t wait to visit them in April! We would also like to thank our sponsors, MediVet, for making this exchange possible.
I graduated from Glasgow in 2017 and worked in a corporate mixed practice in Leicestershire for five months before making the move to an independent mixed practice in Hull. Having been through the job hunting and interview process twice already, here are my top tips for securing the perfect first job.

1. Don’t panic
Everyone always seems in such a hurry to get employed straight away, with many final-year vet students securing their first jobs before they’ve even sat their finals. There’s no need! Considering you’ve just finished at least five years of regimented, scheduled learning and have had to be organised, with EMS placements all planned out in advance, it might seem scary to finish uni without a known direction, but there are so many jobs out there, you do not have to worry about your colleagues getting in there first and snatching up all the good ones. In fact, waiting until after the ‘new grad rush’ can be an advantage. Take a break, enjoy your last few months of uni, you’ve got the rest of your life to work!

2. Dedicate the time
When you do decide to start the job hunt, make sure you dedicate enough time to it. Finding a job and applying are time-consuming processes. You have to individualise your CV and cover letter for each application, as every job will be different and may be looking for slightly different things. Many practices will also advertise because they need a vet at short notice, so applying in March if you don’t want to start until August may not always work out – the practice might be desperate for you to start ASAP after passing your exams, sometimes even before graduation. And you will also need to be available for interviews, so if you’re preoccupied with rotations and finals, don’t worry about job hunting until you’ve got the time to do it properly; it will be worth it in the end.

3. Decide what you want
You may not truly know what you want in your first job until you start working, but with so many veterinary jobs out there, you need to narrow them down somehow. Have a think about what the absolutely perfect vet job would involve and write it down. You may well find it, but if not, try to highlight which criteria are essential to you and which ones are desirable. Most likely, you’ll find some jobs that tick all the essential boxes and some, but not all, of your desired ones as well. Just make sure you seriously consider which factors are most important to you, and do not settle for a job that doesn’t offer them!

The box on page 9 highlights some points to think about.

4. There’s more than just Vet Record
Most of us will begin our job hunt by lazily flicking through the back pages of Vet Record for a few minutes of procrastination. While this
can be useful to get into the habit of what to look for in job adverts, there are many other places that jobs will be advertised. For example, there are far more jobs listed on the Vet Record Careers website (www.vetrecordjobs.com/jobs/) than there are in print, so get looking online! Here’s some ideas of where to look:

- Veterinary publications and their websites;
- Facebook groups;
- Corporate group websites – some new graduate schemes require you to apply to the group as a whole and will then match you with an appropriate practice. Others will display vacancies for individual practices on their websites;
- Check your uni e-mails – some practices will forward adverts on to the universities;
- Recruitment agencies;
- Internships – check individual university/practice websites;
- BEVA jobs board on its website;
- Word of mouth – contacting individual practices, offers via EMS, talk to any new graduates you know.

5. Recruitment agencies

I was advised to avoid recruitment agencies because you are not always sure of the practices that they are recruiting on behalf of, something that is not ideal for recent graduates.

6. Perfect your CV

You will need to customise your CV for each job that you apply to, but it’s a good idea to have a working copy with absolutely everything on it that you can condense and adapt for each role. Since generic CV tips are often not relevant to the veterinary sphere, I would highly recommend using the SPVS (Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons) CV reading service as this provides tailored advice directly from veterinary bosses. It is an invaluable resource available to members (the student membership fee is well worth the investment for this alone). Don’t forget to include a cover letter as well.

7. Find a supportive practice

This can be harder than you may think, mainly because ‘support’ is different for each individual. Try to work out the level of support you think you’ll need and ask in depth at interview whether they will be able to provide it. The key is communication and honesty. Don’t claim to be able to do an unassisted bitch spay in 45 minutes and then fall apart when they book three in for your first morning.

8. Think carefully about graduate programmes

In theory, new grad schemes are a good idea, but they are often marketed as a guarantee that you will have a supportive practice, which they most definitely are not. Your experience in your first job will depend very much on the individual practice, not the larger company that is running the scheme, so if the practice seems great too, then you’re probably on to a winner. The things grad schemes do guarantee you are good quality CPD in your first years in practice and the opportunity to meet up regularly with other grads on the scheme, which are great. Just don’t go in thinking that they are the bulletproof safety net they are sometimes sold as.

9. Be organised

Keep a record of what you’ve done regarding job applications and when. Believe me, it can quickly get very confusing if you’ve called or applied to several very similar practices and it’s easy to forget to chase things up or even get an interview date wrong.

It might sound over-the-top but I made a working spreadsheet detailing which practices I had applied to, their contact details, when I had contacted them or sent my CV and recording any further correspondence. I even started including a screenshot of the advert for the job as I found that by the time I went along for interview, the advert was no longer listed and I couldn’t remember what was in it otherwise.

10. Do your homework

If you’re offered an interview, at the very least have a browse of the practice website and Facebook page. Most of my interviews were informal chats with the boss(es) trying to sell the practice to me rather than the other way around (with the current veterinary employment climate, the ball really is in your court), but you should show that you’ve taken an interest in the practice before you arrive.

Make a list of any questions you want to ask the practice – this may get quite lengthy, but often most of them will be answered during the process of the interview anyway. I often felt totally drained by the end of an interview or taster day and so when presented with the predictable ‘Do you have any more questions for us?’ I’d be drawing a total blank – this is when the list comes in handy; you can whip it out and glance through it to see if you’ve missed anything.

Find out if any of your peers have heard of, or done EMS at, the practice and what they thought of it. Check to see if you have any random Facebook friends who work at the practice (this is where all those people you add in the midst of a drunken Sports Weekend or Congress ball come in handy). Any clue you can get on the working
environment will give you a fuller picture of what it would be like to work there.

11. Look sharp
What to wear for a vet interview can pose a bit of a dilemma. I had worn a full suit to every interview I'd been to before vet school, but felt it would be a bit much for a vet job. You also need to consider whether you might be getting involved in any practical tasks if you have a trial day or are spending more than an hour at the practice (I didn't fancy trying to vaccinate a cat in a suit or walking onto yards in heels).

I tried to dress for the job, going for a checked shirt, chinos and clean boots for mixed vet job interviews. I would often make sure I had a plain scrub top in the car too just in case I got involved with any patients.

12. Undecided? Go back!
Each practice will differ in its interview approach. Some will just be a 'standard' job interview, where you sit down with two or more interviewers and answer questions for an hour. Other bosses will take you out for lunch or coffee for a more informal chat, which I think adds another level of stress – what do you order if they take you out for food? My approach was to wait to see what they ordered and then go for something similar.

Some will ask you to come for the whole morning, afternoon or day to spend some time in the practice, observing and chatting to other members of staff. These are the best ones because they give you a chance to get a much better feel for the practice and general staff morale. But be aware that the bosses will then ask the other staff what they thought of you too.

If you didn't get the opportunity to spend as much time as you'd have liked in the practice or you felt that they may have been hiding something from you, ask if you can go and spend another day there before making a decision. If they deny you the opportunity, that should set off alarm bells immediately!

13. Don't be afraid to say no
Don't panic and accept the first job you are offered. No doubt you'll be over the moon that they want to hire you but if it didn't feel right, don't take it.

Also, don't be pressured into making a decision on the day; some practices will offer you the job on the spot, at interview, which can mean either they're really desperate or they really liked you. Even if you loved the practice and you're 99 per cent sure it's the right job, don't accept there and then – go home, have a sleep and then decide.

Everyone always says there's lots out there and you shouldn't feel pressured into making a rash decision, but the reality is that when you are faced with having to turn something down, it can be incredibly hard. I turned down a job that I thought sounded fantastic and probably would be – at a later stage in my life. But it wasn't quite right for now, and I felt awful about it for weeks afterwards, often on the verge of calling back and asking if the position was still available. In the end, it was worth it because, shortly afterwards, the right job did come up. To give you some perspective, on my second round of job hunting, I attended six interviews and was offered five of the jobs. You have nothing to worry about!

14. Negotiate the package
For your first job, salary may be quite low on your list of priorities; things like support and a friendly team will likely be far more important to you. However, don't let that mean you can be taken for a mug.

It can be very hard as a new graduate to know what is a fair salary/package to expect. Just having a few interviews and talking to your friends will give you an idea of what can be offered. But if you want something solid to benchmark your salary/package against to see if you're getting taken for a ride (or for negotiation purposes), SPVS does a salary survey every year, which is freely accessible to members or, alternatively, the most recent published results can be purchased by non-members, which is well worth the money if it means you can negotiate some extra onto your salary.

I was always told not to negotiate salary until you've been offered the job, which I would say still applies to veterinary jobs, but the likelihood is that the package will be discussed at interview. You may even be asked what salary you think you should get or what you would like included in an employment package. Graduate schemes tend to have standard packages that are fixed, whereas the packages offered by independent practices can vary wildly and therefore are more negotiable.

Try to think about what your ideal package would include, and any tax implications that may come with it. For example, practice-provided accommodation or an accommodation allowance is usually tax free, whereas being provided with a company car for work and private use will incur a large monthly tax bill. Don't be put off by a low-sounding salary if you're given accommodation or other benefits, as these can often more than make up for the apparent disparity.

Nearly all practices will pay for VDS (or equivalent) professional indemnity cover as standard on the practice policy, but they can vary in the provision of other professional memberships such as BVA, BEVA, BSAVA, BCVA, etc. If your practice pays for your MRCVS fees, this is also worth a reasonable amount to you.

Other benefits that may be included could be cycle to work schemes, childcare vouchers, private healthcare, gym discounts, and the list goes on.

15. Accept the dream job
You've found the dream job, nailed the interview, been offered the position and have negotiated your package. Now all that's left to do is say yes!

Good luck and enjoy!
OPINION

The battle of the sexes in the veterinary world

Charlotte Heath (2nd Year, Surrey)

It is 100 years since women won the right to vote and since then there have been dramatic changes in role of women in society. But some attitudes seem hard to change.

Animal husbandry placements, we’ve all been there, right? The variety of placements are really the joy of it. There are the good days – a new exciting thing you haven’t seen before, people around you supporting and helping you, the kind farmer who wants you to get involved.

Then there are the bad days, when something happens that leaves you so taken aback it’s hard to know what to do or say.

One such ‘something’ happened to me when I was on a placement in the summer of my first year. I had just finished a gruelling morning of mucking out stables, poo picking, etc, etc (you know the drill!). I was having a cup of tea, and a much-needed break, when the yard owner came over for a chat. She asked me what it was that I wanted to specialise in. This question, much like the ‘Why do you want to be a vet?’ one, is one that I’ve never really had a definitive answer for – my answer changes daily.

Given that I have spent a large proportion of my life around horses, in varying shapes and sizes, it seemed more than logical to tell her I wished to pursue a career in the equine field. You can imagine my surprise when she turned and laughed in my face.

One such ‘something’ happened to me when I was on a placement in the summer of my first year. I had just finished a gruelling morning of mucking out stables, poo picking, etc, etc (you know the drill!). I was having a cup of tea, and a much-needed break, when the yard owner came over for a chat. She asked me what it was that I wanted to specialise in. This question, much like the ‘Why do you want to be a vet?’ one, is one that I’ve never really had a definitive answer for – my answer changes daily.

Given that I have spent a large proportion of my life around horses, in varying shapes and sizes, it seemed more than logical to tell her I wished to pursue a career in the equine field. You can imagine my surprise when she turned and laughed in my face.

On questioning her reaction, she told me ‘You can’t possibly be an equine vet, you’re much too short!’

Naturally, I went home and cried to my mum, but then I began to wonder: was this an isolated event, or had other women also received similar comments simply because they were female? And also, how has the role of women in veterinary medicine changed over time?

Pioneering woman

The first female vet, Aleen Cust, qualified in the 1890s and worked for more than 20 years before the RCVS accepted her as a member in 1922; now 77 per cent of graduating vets are female. We have come a long way in a short time. The early developments were due to changes in legislation, largely the right for women to vote. As the centenary of this landmark is celebrated, there seems no better time to discuss the progress, and the issues that still exist, with the position of women in veterinary medicine.

Aleen Cust wasn’t permitted to take her final exams, and had to rely on recommendations from her university to secure her first job.

Throughout her career, she and the female vets who followed in her footsteps, were consistently rejected, or told they weren’t as good as the male vets they were working with.

Now, when you consider that some people prefer a female vet, even as farm vets, it could be argued that equality is beginning to be reached. However, the veterinary industry still seems to have some way to go to catch up with the expectations of the modern day.

My case, unsurprisingly, isn’t an isolated one and, equally, isn’t the worst example. Simply putting ‘sexism in the veterinary career’ into an online search engine brings up multiple accounts of women experiencing negative comments about their gender, from clients and even from colleagues, being told they aren’t good enough/qualified enough/strong enough/dedicated enough, compared to their male counterparts.

There might be many reasons behind this difference in attitudes towards female vets – women may be expected to remain in the profession for a lesser amount of time, instead choosing to have children and a family, and to work part time to maintain this. Of course, this isn’t true for all female vets, but could perhaps be a deciding factor for some future employers.

Many members of the public still hold the idealistic ‘James Herriot’ view of the veterinary world, where they expect a male vet to come along to see their dog, right after finishing up on a farm. This just isn’t the way the veterinary world operates any more, and the increasing numbers of female vets, especially in areas such as the farming industry, should, in time, allow antiquated views towards women held by some individuals to be changed.
Pay gap

Recent evidence of a gender pay gap in the veterinary profession shows that efforts also need to be made in this area to bring about equality. An article in The Guardian in June last year suggested that some newly qualified male vets were earning up to £3000 more than their female peers. Meanwhile, work done as part of the Vet Futures project suggested that male vets were far more likely to progress to more highly paid managerial roles, or specialist careers.

In a career where both males and females are equally qualified, undertaking the same level of training, and working equally as hard to get where they are, more should be done to both change people’s perceptions, and encourage an equal wage for the same amount of effort and dedication. In veterinary science, both women and men sacrifice their personal lives for work to get to the position they are in, and both should be rewarded equally for this. For the same quality of work, shouldn’t we all be paid the same? Isn’t this just discrimination?

It’s up to us, and our generation, to do something to make a difference. For every person who makes a negative comment, we need to represent ourselves in the best light, ignoring and rising above what they might say, continuing to pursue the careers we choose. Being told I was too short to be an equine vet isn’t something that I can change, but it isn’t going to stop me following my dreams!

References


Tackling the gender pay gap

Katie Roberts (Cambridge Junior Rep)

Let’s face it, we all know the gender pay gap exists in other professions, but how many of us have considered the impact it will have on us when we graduate in just a few years?

Vet Record recently published an article entitled ‘Gender pay gap exists across the profession’ which shed light on just how significant the pay gap is in our profession. The data used in that article (and this one) came from two recent surveys of veterinary pay carried out by CM Research and the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons.

As an example, CM Research found that, on average, female vets working full time earned £41,152, while males earned £46,921. This is a difference of almost £6000, or 12 per cent. What is perhaps even more worrying is that the gap gets greater the more senior you are: according to the same survey, female partners earned, on average, £51,315 a year, while their male counterparts earned £69,755. That is a staggering £18,440 difference, with males earning 36 per cent more for a job of the same grade.

As well as receiving more lucrative pay packets, men hold a greater proportion of these high-ranking jobs, with 55 per cent of partners and practice owners being male. This discrepancy is emphasised when you consider that only 32 per cent of full-time vets are male. It seems that, as in countless other professions, women are at a disadvantage when it comes to gaining positions of seniority, whether it be because they are discouraged from applying, or considered less able for the job.

Encouragingly, the survey by SPVS found that women who have been qualified for less than 10 years are being paid more per hour; albeit marginally, than men in the same position. However, once qualified for more than 11 years, the position reverses once again and the difference between pay becomes an astonishing 20 per cent in favour of men. As we spend most of our practising careers having been graduated for more than 10 years, this is obviously a significant problem. These numbers also seem to suggest two equally concerning possibilities: either women are being paid less than men for the same work, or men are holding a greater proportion of the more senior roles – a hypothesis that is supported by the data from CM Research.

The female presence in the veterinary profession continues to increase; according to RCVS Facts 2014, the veterinary graduates of 1993 were 44 per cent male and 56 per cent female, while in 2013, 23 per cent of graduates were male and 77 per cent female. With the need to tackle the gender pay gap growing, hopefully our voice and ability to do so will too.

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The bitter taste of a ‘puguccino’

Mike Frill (5th Year, Cambridge)

Fads are nothing new. For years they’ve driven the sales of Rubik’s cubes, Tamagotchis and fidget spinners, only for them to enjoy their five minutes of fame before being left on the shelf to gather dust. The latest craze though is different, and it worries me.

In the past year, ownership of brachycephalic dog breeds has reached an unprecedented record high, and French bulldogs are set to become the most popular dog breed in the UK.

‘Pug cafés’ are the latest manifestation of the brachy-mania to plunder my social media; from Shoreditch to Nottingham to Liverpool, the pop-up coffee shops attract droves of snorting pooches and their fanatical owners. Even if you don’t go yourself, you’ll be sure to see a smattering of photos of your friends who are there. And they’re in good company; David Beckham and Kelly Brook are among a long list of celebrities to show off their flat-faced dogs online.

A recent survey found that almost half of vets believed that clients who choose brachycephalic dog breeds are swayed by social media or celebrity idols. Big brands are well aware of this too – many have used short snouts to promote their products. Pugs and bulldogs are no longer the ridiculed oddities they once were, so it isn’t surprising that they’re enjoying a surge in popularity.

It’s the dogs I fear for here. More than ever, pugs and bulldogs are developing serious respiratory problems because of their increasingly extreme facial features. Rising demand for dogs with flatter faces means that brachycephalic dog breeds have been bred far too quickly for the rest of their body to catch up, and it is seriously reducing their quality of life. In fact, brachycephalic dogs can expect to live three years less than those without such features. Their fame has come at a cost.

Can’t everyone hear how pugs labour themselves around? Well, no; actually; 60 per cent of owners of brachycephalic dog breeds don’t recognise that their animal is experiencing respiratory difficulties. Perhaps they don’t know that they should listen. It would be obvious in any other breed, but in pugs and bulldogs it seems to be ignored. In the eyes of most people, these symptoms have become characteristics of these breeds. The big puppy eyes and rolls of blubber are ‘cute’, and the neotenic features of their puppy blend their obvious breathing problems into one adorable blur.

Taking a stand

Vet Record announced last year that it would no longer publish adverts that use brachycephalic dogs to sell nonspecific products. It’s a brave move, and more publishers need to do the same. Changing the media portrayal of brachycephalic dogs, even if the audience is mainly vets, is the start of convincing the world.

The BVA’s #BreedtoBreathe campaign aims to do just this: to advise the public on what it really means to have a brachycephalic dog. Its position statement on brachycephaly sets out what vets can do to improve the welfare of brachycephalic dogs and promote responsible ownership. It gives a platform for advances to be made on, and I’m sure that this is just the start. Starting within professional publications, the nationwide media has to catch on and change the way it influences owners.

This may be a start, but nobody ever changed the world by tweeting about it. To address the root of the problem, we have to consider regulating dog breeding, or brachycephalic dog breeds could soon hit the point of no return.

Recent changes to the law cracked down on puppy farming and improved the lives of many breeding animals. However, it feels like a missed chance to license breeders and have a direct say on who breeds dogs, and in what interest. You’d be hard pushed to find a group that actively lobbies the government in support of this, and it’s hard to envisage a future where brachycephalic features improve without it.

The writing is on the wall for brachycephalic dog breeds, and we need to act fast to change that. Progressive improvements to hereditary conditions require responsible actions from everyone, and that means targeting the right people: vets, the media, and those sipping a latté at the Pug Café.
The forgotten pet: the realities of ensuring good rabbit welfare

Sophie Ingledew (4th Year, Cambridge)

When I was nine years old my first pet rabbit died of fly strike. At the time I was traumatised and, looking back, I realise that he had suffered for a long time before he was taken to the vets. I vowed to myself that I would never let it happen to another rabbit of mine. Little did I know how common this kind of story still is today, 13 years later . . .

As of 2017, there are 1.1 million pet rabbits in the UK, and it saddens me to think of the extent and significance of the poor rabbit welfare seen nationally.

The reality is that the UK is in the midst of a serious rabbit welfare crisis. While these animals are the third most common mammalian pet, many people simply do not know how to look after them. In 2006, the RSPCA warned that rabbits were the ‘most abused pet’ in England and Wales.1

More recently, the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) report2 has identified some major issues with the way in which many people are keeping their pet rabbits and compromising their welfare. For example, in the wild, rabbits depend on complex social hierarchies, and as a pet, need to be homed with at least one other neutered rabbit to avoid loneliness. Yet 56 per cent of pet rabbits in the UK are living alone.2

Misconceptions: an easy and cheap pet

Despite their seemingly low ‘shop value’, rabbits are not cheap animals to keep. A staggering 92 per cent of rabbit owners underestimated the minimum lifetime cost of rabbit ownership, which is around £6500 – £9000 per pair of rabbits.2 It is possible that this underestimation of cost may manifest as reluctance to seek veterinary assistance when it is needed, especially when the cost of the consultation alone is likely to be more than the cost of the rabbit itself.

Twenty-five per cent of rabbit owners stated that the reason they bought a rabbit was because their children wanted a pet.2 Rabbits are not easy animals to keep, nor do they make great pets for children. They are prey animals and being picked up can make them feel frightened and insecure. Furthermore, children tend to lose interest in the rabbit and the parents end up being the primary carer for a pet that, in reality, they did not want responsibility for.

‘A hutch is not enough’

In 2016, Rabbit Awareness Week (RAW) ran a campaign entitled ‘A hutch is not enough’, to raise the issue of inadequate space and housing imposed on many pet rabbits.

The traditional view of rabbits living in hutches was born out of the 19th century when the rabbit meat industry exploded in the UK, and has carried over into housing of the domestic pet. In the wild, rabbits carry out high levels of exercise over vast amounts of space, and so a little hutch and a tiny run at the bottom of the garden simply isn’t enough. Consequently, 35 per cent of UK pet rabbits are living in inadequate housing.2

Diet – a major concern

Many of the clinical health problems seen in rabbits are a result of an inappropriate diet. It is of great importance for a rabbit’s health that approximately 80 per cent of their diet is made up of fresh grass or hay, along with some greens and a handful of pellets. While this information should be common knowledge, 31 per cent of rabbits are being fed less hay than required.2

For many years now, and with solid evidence behind them, vets have been recommending against feeding muesli-style feed and advocating extruded pellets. Yet 25 per cent of rabbits continue to be fed
a muesli mix as part of their main food.2

Legal protection
The responsibility of the owner for their pet’s welfare is enshrined in the Animal Welfare Act (2006). However, 27 per cent of owners have never heard of this legislation.2

While most rabbit owners do not intend to cause harm to their pet, ignorance can cause suffering by neglect.

Nonetheless, not all the blame can fall on the public. The English government has constructed ‘codes of practice’ on how to provide for the welfare needs of both dogs and cats, but has not done so for rabbits. It argues that there is plenty of information already available on how to care for rabbits. While this argument is valid (good resources are provided by the Welsh government and organisations such as the PDSA, Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund and Animal Welfare Foundation, to name but a few), this information is not necessarily easy for a potential rabbit owner to find. Furthermore, this lack of interest in rabbit welfare from our government is likely to perpetuate the misconception that rabbits are easy and cheap to look after.

Awareness within the veterinary profession
There is no doubt that there is awareness of these welfare issues within the veterinary profession. In 2014, the BVA Voice of the Veterinary Profession survey found that 1 in 5 British vets were concerned about rabbits kept as pets. A second survey by the BVA in 2017 highlighted that 85 per cent of vets had serious concerns about rabbit health due to the wrong diet. The BVA also supports the RSPCA-led Rabbit Welfare Vision Statement, which aspires to help improve rabbit welfare by promoting methods such as effective training programmes for all those working with rabbits. The Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund has just completed a successful year of rabbit CPD programmes and is calling on delegates to make suggestions for this year’s schedule.

Does this translate to awareness within the rabbit owner population?
Although, as vets, most of us are aware of the problems faced by many pet rabbits, there seems to be a barrier to translating this information to the owners. For example, 80 per cent of female rabbits over the age of five are at risk of uterine carcinoma, yet 44 per cent of rabbits have not been neutered.2

A truly worrying statistic is that 50 per cent of rabbits have not had a primary vaccination course.2 The two diseases that we offer routine vaccinations against, myxomatosis and rabbit haemorrhagic disease, are often fatal. Practising vets are a trusted source of information and are ideally placed to continuously educate owners on the basic needs and medical requirements of pets, yet as a profession we are failing to convince owners that their rabbits are worth vaccinating.

Who is responsible for providing this information?
Although vets are in a prime position to provide advice and guidance for current rabbit owners, 32 per cent of rabbits are not registered with a vet.2 In addition, 8 per cent of rabbit owners did no research before buying their pet.2 How are we supposed to educate people who we, as vets, do not have contact with?

Perhaps one strategy could be to make it a legal requirement for rabbit sellers to provide the necessary information. After all, every rabbit owner must come in to contact with them when purchasing their pet. Forty per cent of owners get their rabbit from a pet shop,2 yet there is currently no law that states breeders or pet shops have to provide information on how to care properly for these animals upon making a sale.

Raising the profile
The findings of the most recent PAW report (2017) highlighted that although some improvements have been made in recent years, there is still a need to raise the profile of rabbits as complex animals that require dedicated ownership. We need current and prospective owners to be more aware and understanding of their needs.

Both vets and pet shops have a role to play in educating the public on these matters. It’s clear that engaging with owners before they purchase their pets is essential in improving the health and wellbeing of rabbits. Discouraging owners from buying a pet rabbit unless they have carried out adequate research is essential to ensure that these intelligent and social creatures are not forgotten at the bottom of the garden.

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Just getting old?

Hannah Shotnes (4th Year, Bristol)

Attitudes and approaches towards canine arthritis need to change as the condition should not be regarded simply as part of getting old.

Bristol vet school recently hosted a talk by Hannah Capon, founder of Canine Arthritis Management (CAM),1 which addressed the many issues surrounding what she believes is an inadequate approach to canine arthritis in veterinary medicine. Hannah is an extremely passionate and engaging speaker, who approached this disease from a position of empathy and compassion. This was refreshing for me as a vet student who has all too often seen arthritic dogs dismissed as ‘just getting old’, and the owner handed some non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and left without an understanding of the disease or the range of potential treatment options.

The most common form of arthritis in dogs is osteoarthritis, a progressive degeneration of cartilage surrounding joints, resulting in chronic pain.2 Signs of arthritis, such as lameness and exercise intolerance,3 are often seen as changes to be expected with age and, unfortunately, this attitude is common among owners, and even some vets.

The combination of one-dimensional management and poor attitude towards this extremely painful condition has resulted in many owners feeling that there is a predetermined course for arthritic dogs, ultimately leading to an unacceptable impact on their quality of life. Canine arthritis is one of the main causes of elective euthanasia in the UK1 and this concerning fact highlights the need for a change in the attitude and approach to this condition.

CAM aims to address this through increased awareness, education and long-term management plans.1,4 Ultimately, it hopes to change the view of canine arthritis from being an expected part of ageing to a manageable condition that does not result in inevitable euthanasia.1,4

Complex problem

Arthritis is a complex condition and, although it is highly relevant in veterinary medicine,3 its management is confounded by a plethora of problems. The condition is still not well understood, which is surprising considering that it is very common (with four out of five dogs over eight years old affected) and familiar to many owners.3,4

One of the most critical issues highlighted by Hannah was a lack of effective communication with owners about the cause of arthritis, how drugs work and the range of treatment options available. This deserves more than the 10- or 15-minute consultation time vets are often limited to. Hannah described how many owners feel that they are not given enough time or guidance and how insufficient understanding leads to poor compliance and reliance on other easily accessible sources, such as online advice and the recommendations of friends.4
One of the most thought-provoking points Hannah raised was the issue of identifying chronic pain. Many dogs appear stoic in the face of chronic pain, and this has led to many owners having misconceptions about the level of pain their pets are enduring. These include the beliefs that dogs readily vocalise pain, that they would not continue to jump in the car or chase a ball if they were in pain, and that they would avoid the use of the affected limb(s).6

One in five people claim to suffer from chronic pain7 and we all know family members or friends who continue with their daily lives despite pain—and the same is true for animals. This means that owners commonly do not realise that their dogs are suffering and so often do not visit their vet until the disease has progressed.

Identifying chronic pain can be challenging due to the differences between how pain is expressed in humans and animals, subjectivity in its assessment and the difficulties in quantifying pain.5 However, the assessment of chronic pain is essential to monitor progression of arthritis, but many vets view the difficulties associated with this as significantly impeding effective treatment.5 How can vets expect owners to identify signs of chronic joint pain in their animals if they themselves find it difficult?8

Often, no further investigations are carried out following a diagnosis of arthritis but many vets base the treatment regime for canine arthritis on disease severity, with pain often used as an indicator of this. Consequently, management may be ineffective if pain has not been accurately assessed.6

**Drop the white coat**

Crucial changes need to be implemented in the management of canine arthritis and improving communication with owners is key. Ensuring owner understanding of the disease process and how drugs such as NSAIDs work will help reassure fears about the long-term use of medications. This, in turn, will reduce use of alternative ‘remedies’ pursued in the hope of a safer treatment, but which tend to be ineffective and may not be designed for use in animals.4,7 Discussions with owners need prolonged time and longer; uninterrupted consults are essential in order to give this disease the attention it demands and deserves.4,7

The novel approach of CAM encourages tact and humanity at the forefront of interactions with owners and Hannah is a firm believer that vets should ‘drop the white coat’ and remember that empathy and positivity are vital. Vets often focus on the medical aspect of their cases, but we also have a duty of care that goes beyond this. We need to be able to bridge the gap between professional and personal and place ourselves in the position of owners.4

Hannah strongly encourages vets and vet students to consider factors other than medical management. Although advising owners about adaptations to the home in line with their dog’s needs can be difficult, this is an important element of arthritis management.4 Simple changes, such as tractable flooring, or a ramp to avoid the step down into the garden, can make a remarkable difference to an animal’s quality of life.

She also advocated additional tools for use in the management of canine arthritis. CAM has developed a 5 x 5 x 5 staging, grading and scoring protocol.4 Staging and grading the disease allows appreciation of which point in the treatment plan and disease process the animal has reached, communication of prognostic indicators and a complete work up. Scoring the level of pain aids communication with owners and can indicate when it is necessary to take further action to fully manage the condition.

Further tools include tailored chronic pain charts, formalised reassessment plans and client-specific outcome measures (CSOMs).4 CSOMs are semi-objective measures that owners can use to monitor changes in impairment of behaviours regularly exhibited by cats and dogs, such as how easy their pets find different levels of exercise or use of the litter tray.4,8 Improving the tools available will help owners to recognise the signs of chronic pain and enable them to easily and effectively monitor their animal’s condition.

**Age is not a disease**

More research is needed into arthritis to develop understanding of the disease; this, in turn, will improve treatment and prognosis. Arthritis management should target a range of factors, not just medical options, and collaboration with colleagues and specialists in areas that vets do not have expertise in will help with this, such as home modification and nutrition.

I highly recommend that vet students and practising vets consider how arthritis cases are currently approached, and take on board the issues raised by CAM, in particular communication with owners, chronic pain identification and, most fundamentally of all, remember that age is not a disease.

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A journey of 2961 miles starts with a single steppe

Tom Bunn (Final Year, RVC)

In our final year at the RVC, we have to complete a research project. This can be a fantastic opportunity to do some lab work, analyse hospital records, or even create a questionnaire asking students what they think about having to do a research project! For mine though, I went to Kazakhstan.

In 2015, disaster struck for the saiga antelope in Kazakhstan; over 200,000 saiga died during their calving season. Representing over 60 per cent of the global population, and with 100 per cent mortality in affected herds, this was a major event for a critically endangered species.

Since 2013, a multidisciplinary team of scientists from the universities of London, Oxford, Bristol and Queens Belfast, under the authority of the Committee for Forestry and Wildlife, Ministry of Agriculture, Republic of Kazakhstan, and coordinated by the Association for Conservation of Biodiversity and the Biosafety Institute, Gvardeisky, has visited the calving aggregations each year to undertake biological monitoring, record environmental conditions, mortality and the state of the major populations.

Research is ongoing into the factors leading to die-offs and how – if – they can be mitigated. The cause of the 2015 event has been confirmed as haemorrhagic septicaemia (HS) caused by *Pasteurella multocida*, a commensal, which apparently breached the immune defences and invaded the blood stream of all the animals in an almost synchronous event, exploiting unusually warm and humid environmental conditions. This process has recently been fully described by Kock et al.1

Steppe-ing into research

In 2017, I was fortunate enough to join the expedition to the Kazakh steppe, pursuing a research project to characterise the anatomy of the tonsillar tissues in saiga. Why, you may (understandably) ask? A major question in relation to the saiga susceptibility to HS is the prevalence of Pasteurellaceae in the species. In HS in livestock there is evidence that, at times, the organism is cryptic in the tonsils of a high proportion of animals, which is considered important in the outbreaks reported.2 So tonsils are a good sampling site for *P. multocida*, and accurately swabbing them during examination or necropsy is useful to understand the background commensalism of the organism. You’ll be surprised to hear that the tonsillar anatomy of the saiga and many non-domestic species has not yet been well described!
Studying wild populations is rarely straightforward, but I am so grateful for the opportunity I had to get involved in this project. Those two-and-a-half weeks turned out to be one of the best experiences I have had at vet school: spending two weeks traversing and camping on the steppe, miles from anyone else and with the darkest night skies I’ve ever seen; being welcomed into a ranger’s home with incredible horse beshbarmak and many vodka toasts; seeing the wildlife that flourishes in such an extreme environment with the people that know it; drinking shots (of what was either vodka or the expedition’s parasitology ethanol) for each of my newfound honorary uncles in the Kazakh ranger service in the shade of an ex-military truck on the sand of what was once the Aral Sea; finding first saiga tracks, and then seeing small groups on the horizon; the stress of not knowing where the main groups were due to limited GPS information; finding a single dead female near the road (with two near-term fetuses) and knowing I would at least have some data, as morbid as that sounds; the day we randomly found a single bar of signal and suddenly had the chance to text friends and family; starting back towards civilisation knowing that we could have been within miles of 60,000 calving saiga and never known; a brief crash into a ditch in an ex-soviet ‘tabletka’ van, that always kept running (possibly on sheer incomprehension of the concept of stopping); discovering the parasitology ethanol was gone; hearing on our re-entry to the communication network that there were saiga calving elsewhere and we still had a few days before our flights; joining a calving aggregation just in time to spend one amazing day walking transects and taking samples before they dispersed in the night; watching my supervisor give an interview (under interpretation) to a Kazakh film crew at a ranger station a long way from main roads; returning to Astana, Kazakhstan’s capital for a brief explore of the city, and a more thorough explore of the samples in the National Veterinary Reference Laboratory before flying home.

Both action-packed and incredibly chilled, it’s surreal to think back to those brief, but exciting times. It subsequently took months to organise CITES permission to import my samples, only for them to arrive after my research deadline. I had to come up with a whole new write-up on tonsillar dissection technique on sheep and alpaca in a few intense weeks with the RVC pathology team. I’ve now got my samples, and the opportunity to look at them as planned, in the run up to my finals (we’ll see how that bit goes . . . ).

It’s been quite a ride, and this project was only possible through the generous efforts of my supervisors, Professor Richard Kock and Dr Henny Martineau. Steffen Zuther and the team at ACBK were incredible for hosting us and organising the expedition to the steppe and I was also fortunate enough to receive support with funding from the RVC Zoological Society and BVZS Zebra Foundation.

References
Do ewe have what it takes to be a great sheep vet?

Ginnie Baker (3rd Year, Edinburgh)

A little while ago I was pondering on the ways in which vets can engage with sheep farmers and demonstrate the benefits of working with flocks to improve ovine health.

On one of the most impressive lambing placements I have been on, the farmer was very keen to find an enthusiastic vet who could help him improve the health of his flock, at the same time as maximising his profits.

Unfortunately, when pressed further, he admitted that he felt that none of the vets at his local practice was excited to take on the role.

After doing some research, I found examples of ‘Flock Health Clubs’, which had been set up by practices and which successfully connected farmers and interested vets. These were receiving some very positive feedback, so, in early November, I contacted Flock Health, the sheep veterinary consultancy behind the initiative (www.flockhealth.co.uk) hoping that someone might come to speak to our Edinburgh Farm Animal Vet Society (EFAVS) about how best to set up and run these clubs. What I hadn’t anticipated was what an impressive speaker they would recommend – Dr Fiona Lovatt.

Dr Lovatt is an RCVS Recognised Specialist in Sheep Health and Production and a diplomate of the European College of Small Ruminant Health Management.

On February 8, we had the pleasure of welcoming Dr Lovatt to Edinburgh to talk to us about Flock Health Clubs and lameness. Her fascinating talk explained more about how the clubs work and their benefits to farmers and their livestock.

Flock Health Clubs are discussion groups of local farmers run and facilitated by a vet. Dr Lovatt advises they should be separated based on the enterprise of the farm; for example, Smallholders Club, Large Flock Club or Pedigree Flock Club, as these will each require a different approach and desired outcomes vary greatly. She recommends that these are most effective when they:

- Comprise approximately 12 producers from similar farm types;
- Offer structured meetings with practicals and hands-on aspects;
- Focus on the positives when choosing a meeting topic to capture interest;
- Include benchmarking of flock performance and financials, encouraging healthy competition;
- Demonstrate trust and commitment of time to meetings;
- Offer low monthly subscriptions with bolt-ons/deals (for example, £25 per month for Large Flock Health Club with 10 members, including benchmarking, flock health planning and medicine deals).

Dr Lovatt emphasised that, while running costs shouldn’t be high, we value what we invest in and persuading partners that this is a worthwhile venture is often swung by possible financial benefit. However, it is important to be realistic and acknowledge that the value of creating a trusting relationship between local vets and farmers is by far the most important part of the clubs.

The second half of the talk considered one of the greatest welfare problems afflicting the sheep industry, lameness. This focused on the ‘Five Point Plan’ developed by Ruth Clements and the team at FAI Farms in Oxford, which has been promoted as a way of reducing sheep lameness to under 2 per cent by 2021. The five points are:

1. Cull badly or repeatedly affected animals;
2. Treat clinical cases early;
3. Quarantine incoming animals;
4. Avoid spreading infection at gathering and handling;
5. Vaccinate against footrot.

There is overwhelming evidence of how prevalent lameness is on farms. The estimated £15,000 cost of an 8 per cent lameness level in a flock of 1000 shows just how important it is to address this issue. With the spring lambing season coming up, I hope many of those at our meeting will take a moment to think about this plan while on their farms, and about how well their hosts are doing or where improvements could be made.

The time flew by and at the end of the talk we were all buzzing with questions. We were very grateful to Dr Lovatt for taking the time to come to talk to us and would also like to thank MSD for its support.

I look forward to EFAVS future practicals and talks with the hope that they will be as inspiring, and be an exciting reminder of why we all first applied to vet school.
We’re all going to the zoo . . .

Charlie Roper (3rd Year, Liverpool)

Liverpool University Veterinary Zoological Society (LUVZS) met excitedly at the airport, raring to go for a fun-filled weekend away in Copenhagen after January exams. What better way to escape than to board a plane to another country and fill ourselves with our favourite thing in the world – going to see animals!

We began our weekend at Copenhagen Zoo, where we were given a tour by a third-year vet student who works there part time. She explained to us the core values of the zoo, the layout of enclosures and enrichment, with particular emphasis on the veterinary aspects. We then dispersed excitedly to immerse ourselves in the world of zoo.

The zoo is thoughtfully laid out in geographical regions: Asia, Africa, Tasmania, South America and the Tropical zoo. In the Asia section, the two glass-domed elephant enclosures caught our eye. Designed by British architects Foster + Partners, they make use of the site’s natural properties to provide insulation. This is considered one of the best elephant enclosures in the world, built with the behavioural patterns of elephants in mind. Bull elephants tend to roam away from the main herd, and this was what initiated the idea of two separate enclosures.

As we walked up the bridge above the savanna area containing iconic animals such as white rhino, giraffes, impalas, antelopes, ostriches and zebras, we stopped to hear a little about a clever way of time-sharing the space and making the environment more stimulating. The hippos have partial access to the savanna area, which they can enter from their own enclosure. This partial access gate helps give the animals somewhere to run away to, and also allows the area to have the scent of many different animals and so makes it more stimulating for all involved.

One issue that I couldn’t get my head round was the zoo’s practice of breeding of more animals than needed, then subsequently culling. The aim is to create a population that is both genetically diverse and healthy. Everyone has different opinions on such a controversial subject, and it was an interesting cultural difference we encountered.

By the time we regrouped after our tour, we were all exhausted but determined to make the most of the sights – Copenhagen is an appealing city with a friendly, welcoming atmosphere.
of our time before our flight home. We weren’t in Copenhagen for all that long, so we wanted to make most of it.

Copenhagen is a city full of character, with a very appealing ambience. There was so much kindness, happiness, politeness and good humour in everyone I met out there. Everything I learned amazed me – such as the fact that Copenhagen ranked as the top city in the world for cycling in 2017, with 62 per cent of citizens biking to work or school. Denmark ranks among the top five safest countries in the world and comes in second place in the global happiness rankings.

Over the weekend we also learnt about how the Danish welfare system means Denmark has one of the smallest wealth gaps in the world. The benefits of this system include a generous unemployment benefit, national free healthcare and education, subsidised childcare, job training, rent allowances for the elderly and a good pension – a system that seemed vastly different from the UK’s. But the tax levels were something we definitely noticed over the weekend of spending: the Danish pay up to 51.95 per cent tax, which seemed extremely high to us. However, it became clear to me that the high tax was being put back into everything we saw. And despite the high tax, the welfare system and general attitude to life left me wanting to move to Denmark!

LUVZS’ first trip abroad saw us not wanting to return home and already looking forward to the trips abroad that are yet to come. It’s safe to say the word that resonated most with us over the weekend was ‘impressed’ – we couldn’t have had a better weekend if we tried! Until next time Denmark, thank you for welcoming and inspiring us; I’m sure we’ll be back!

Source material
1  http://worldhappiness.report/ed/2017/
3  www.dezeen.com/2008/06/1/elephant-house-at-copenhagen-zoo-by-foster-partners/
5  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copenhagen_Zoo
7  www.express.co.uk/travel/articles/755948/safest-countries-2017
8  www.cntraveler.com/stories/2016-06-17/the-worlds-10-safest-countries-to-visit-are

A zoological first for Surrey

Daniel Gillett (3rd Year, Surrey)

Surrey’s entry to the hosting rota for the annual Southern Zoological Symposium in February may have involved some inevitable speed bumps and complications but, looking back, was a hugely enjoyable success.

One hundred and fifty-seven students turned out for the weekend to experience hands-on practicals, eight diverse lectures and the result of the committee’s attempts to entirely self-prepare meals, all topped off by a wonderful night of music into the wee small hours at the Mandalay Hotel. We are very proud to have had the opportunity to introduce Surrey to the visiting students and speakers.

Aiming to ensure a wide variety in subject matter, our external speakers joined us from many different areas of the zoological world, with varying backgrounds both clinical and non-clinical. Our intention was to inspire the future exotic pet, zoo, wildlife and research vets of the world and hopefully we achieved that. Each speaker brought their own unique style and insight, together with a healthy dose of humour; and received a warm reception.

At the university’s stunning pathology centre, Dr Maru Urbina from the Wildlife Aid Foundation (who opened the event for us on Saturday morning) guided students through wildlife postmortem examinations on cadavers from the foundation, including hedgehogs, squirrels and a variety of birds. Feedback from this practical was excellent and we cannot thank Dr Urbina and the Wildlife Aid Foundation enough for their time and specimens. Dr Elizabeth-Ann King of Medivet Canvey Island and her nursing team also offered us their time, expertise and animals to lead an engaging and exciting animal handling session with ferrets, lizards, tortoises and snakes – for many students, this was their first time handling these species, but we are certain it will not be their last!

Invertebrate first aid with Sarah Pellet offered a fascinating insight into the basic work vets can do with undervalued and sometimes feared species in first opinion practice.

Each member of our committee – Daniel Gillett, Charles Holloway-Wheatley, Megan Ballman, Sam Burch and Becca Hearne – deserves credit for delivering this event after over a year of preparation. Special thanks are due to Verity Peake for masterminding and powering on with the event despite any-and-all difficulties, and to our academic lead Dr Dan Horton.

Our thanks also go to Susie Pritchard of Heathrow (a partner of the university), Ty Capel of ZSL, Alan Wilson of the RVC, Annie Bentley of Monkey World and Dr Martin Whitehead of Chipping Norton Veterinary Hospital. In addition, we would like to thank Surrey’s own Barbara Bacci and Dan Horton for stepping in to lecture at the last minute.

Finally, a thank you to our sponsor PALS VetLab and to their representative Mary Pinborough for delivering a case-based learning session for us, and to our charity partners Animal Neighbours (whose director Sharmini Paramasisam also delivered a case-based session) and Wildlife Aid Foundation.
With the One Health initiative becoming ever more widely recognised, the committee of the Cambridge University One Health Society decided to host an interdisciplinary careers day. The event also saw the launch of a new leaflet highlighting postgraduate opportunities in veterinary public health.

Titled ‘The Future of Care . . . A Future We Share’, and held in the idyllic setting of Clare College in January, the aim of the careers day was to showcase the broad range of careers and opportunities that are available to graduates in the One Health field today. The enthusiastic audience reflected the many disciplines involved in the One Health movement; students of medicine, natural sciences and public health, as well as veterinary students from both Cambridge and the RVC, attended.

For some months, the Cambridge University One Health Society has been cooperating with the Veterinary Public Health Association (VPHA), supported by Government Veterinary Services, in designing a new leaflet on postgraduate opportunities in veterinary public health in the UK and Ireland. The leaflet is an attempt to summarise the options available, through educational institutions across the UK and Ireland, to veterinarians who wish to enhance their academic credentials in the One Health sphere. Publication was completed earlier this year, which meant the careers day was the perfect platform to launch the leaflet before distribution begins to final-year veterinary students.

The event boasted speakers from a wide range of backgrounds and disciplines, who generously offered to share their expertise and experiences.

- Simon Hall, Veterinary Director at the Animal and Plant Health Agency, shed light on the inner workings of vets in government and explored the developing challenge of avian influenza.
- David Edwards, from the East of England Health Protection Team, gave an insight into the diverse team that constitutes Public Health England, illustrating it with his own career path to becoming a Registrar.
- Milorad Radakovic, senior vice-president of the VPHA and Teaching Fellow in veterinary public health at the University of Cambridge, explained how veterinarians, working in collaboration with others, can contribute to the wellbeing of animals, people and the environment in both the developing and developed world. He emphasised that vets should improve the communication of their collective contribution to others.
- Andrew Conlan talked us through the principles of epidemiology, the One Health approach to bovine TB control and the role a physicist can play in population disease modelling.
- Frances Henson discussed her life and work as a veterinary surgeon working on orthopaedic research alongside medical colleagues from Addenbrooke’s hospital.
- Raymond Bujdos, principal investigator of a prion group at the University of Cambridge, closed the day with a detailed explanation of his ground-breaking work on prion diseases, as well as highlighting the benefits of postgraduate education.

Lively discussion took place throughout the event, with lots of interaction between the speakers and students bringing to the fore unique perspectives on the different issues raised. A free buffet lunch and afternoon coffee offered a great opportunity for further conversation, active networking and a chance to catch up with the other students.

With the UK’s imminent exit from the EU, as well as constant scientific advances both in medical treatments and disease control, the importance of continued emphasis on interdisciplinary cooperation is ever more apparent. Students were given a great opportunity to explore these issues and many thanks have to go to the VPHA for its support of the day.
Straight from the horse’s mouth: SEVA Congress 2018

Jessica French (SEVA Congress Organising Committee)

The Student Equine Veterinary Association (SEVA) was formed by students across the UK vet schools who had a mutual interest in equine practice. Since 2013, an annual congress has been held, open to all veterinary students who want to meet like-minded people, learn from some of the best in the equine business and cement the SEVA bond between universities. This year the University of Liverpool hosted its very first SEVA Congress, and I’m here to give a first-hand account of events . . . straight from the horse’s mouth so to speak!

The eagerly anticipated congress began on Friday night when Liverpool’s Leahurst campus was invaded by a hoard of eager vet students who had travelled the length and breadth of the country to see what our university had to offer. The specially selected set of ‘horsey nerds’ who made up the SEVA committee had been working tirelessly for months to get ready for the congress and make sure every eventuality was prepared for. The Lord Trees Bar was in full swing, the pizza wagon was busily satisfying hungry travellers and Liverpool vet school’s much-loved band One Dissection took to the floor. Soon the marquee filled with students having an out-of-tune singalong and exhibiting some rather questionable dance moves.

At the end of the night, Liverpool students swept the campus on a mission to find their guests for the weekend, for which the usual vet student hosting set-up had been organised. Hosts were supplied with enough food to feed a small army (not that anyone was complaining come Sunday morning when ‘hangover breakfast’ was a necessity) and we were left to play the well-known game of human Tetris – it never ceases to amaze me just how many people you can squeeze on to an airbed!

Ready to learn

We arrived on Saturday morning bright-eyed and ready to learn like the self-proclaimed nerds we all were. The committee had split the congress attendees into three streams to keep numbers low for maximum hands-on opportunities in the practicals, something that is always appreciated at any student congress.

My day began with orthopaedics, and the semi-controlled mummification of the equine practice horse models. Next, we were let loose with what could be mistaken by any passers-by as several implements of torture to practise testing for and paring out foot abscesses. There was definitely some dangerous knife wielding going on, though I’m told no one was harmed during this practical – a good start I guess!

This was followed by Lesley Barwise-Munro, ex-BEVA president and senior veterinary surgeon for Newcastle Racecourse, who gave a brilliant demonstration of how a lameness work-up should be done using one of our glamorous teaching ponies, Knotty. It was a fantastic ‘learn by doing’ session, although I think Knotty was less than impressed about being ‘volunteered’ to be poked and prodded by multiple students. (I’m told she was well compensated for her time and patience.)

These practicals were fantastic for cementing the hands-on aspects of equine orthopaedics. So many of us are practical learners and the SEVA committee catered to this at every opportunity throughout the weekend, an approach that we all benefitted from.

Next, we were greeted by a scene that, on first appearance, looked like something from the ‘Godfather’ film. We were met by several severed horse heads, and I couldn’t help
Looking at a gift horse in the mouth – honing our equine dentistry skills

but ask myself: ‘I wonder what the maths students are doing right now?’ I doubt they were spending their weekends elbow-deep in a horse carcase! However, as we all got stuck in, we were pleasantly surprised by just how useful this approach was for cementing basic dental principles. Vicki Nicholls, BEVA president 2016/17 and Advanced Veterinary Practitioner in equine medicine and equine dentistry, gave an excellent ‘Equine dentistry guide for dummies,’ providing useful ways to remember the minefield of equine dentistry.

This was definitely one of the sessions that I gained most from; Vicki made us all feel completely relaxed with her fun attitude and approach to teaching. As well as getting excellent instruction and visualisation of equine dentition, we all tried our hand at using the various dental instruments. Overall, when leaving this practical, we all agreed that we were feeling much more confident about tackling basic equine dentistry.

After lunch – during which Gemma Davidson of Protexin delivered an inspiring talk about what to do if you feel a career in clinical practice isn’t for you – it was lecture time. After spending a year on rotations and being incredibly out of practice at sitting in a stuffy lecture theatre for extended periods, I was somewhat sceptical about my ability to pay attention, but I was pleasantly surprised to be proven wrong.

Jeremy Kemp Symonds gave a fantastically relevant lecture on strangles, based on his time working with Bransby Horses, one of the UK’s largest equine charities. Then Catherine Dunnett, founder of Independent Equine Nutrition, really drove home how good management of nutrition could aid or even solve a plethora of equine conditions.

Putting on the glad rags

One of the most anticipated events of the entire weekend was the chance to dress up in our finery and visit what could possibly be the most ideal location for a SEVA ball ever, Aintree Racecourse, home of the Grand National! It was a fantastic night with a raffle that raised £1750 for the Willberry Wonder Pony charity, with some excellent prizes donated by our sponsors and other local businesses. There was not a dry eye in the house following a speech by a representative of the charity, discussing its origins and the work it now does funding research into finding a cure for osteosarcomas and granting ‘Willberry’s wishes’ to sufferers with a passion for riding.

Professor Debbie Archer, soft tissue surgeon at Liverpool University, also spoke at the ball. She thanked everyone involved in making SEVA happen, and discussed her own personal ties to the Horse Trust, one of the key sponsors of the SEVA event, and commented that her suturing practical may be a little ‘interesting’ the next day following the copious amounts of wine consumed!

The evening continued with an exciting race night before the dancing began. Vet students and clinicians alike sang and boogied away to classic party tunes while Aintree kindly supplied a photographer who was kept busy snapping away to capture what was definitely one of the best nights of the vet school social calendar!

Prepurchase examinations

The following morning, feeling slightly fragile but fuelled with bacon butties, we braved the miserable north-western weather to spend

Under the watchful eye of a Willberry Wonder Pony, students gather in a lecture theatre at Liverpool for the SEVA Congress
our Sunday learning about grass sickness and prepurchase exams. After all, if vet students are good at anything, it’s getting out of bed hideously early the morning after a party!

‘Don’t break the horse during the vetting’ was the very sound advice from clinician Luke Edwards during the first lecture of the morning. Using humour and a dead-pan expression, Luke managed to keep the attention of even the most hungover of students and made prepurchase exams seem like a walk in the park.

Next was a fantastic run through of equine parasitology by Liverpool’s own Jane Hodgkinson which, for the final-year students, came as welcome revision of our third-year lectures that had long since been pushed to the dark depths of our brains.

This was followed by a lecture on equine grass sickness by Jo Ireland who, in partnership with the Animal Health Trust, has done extensive work on this topic. The SEVA committee did a fantastic job in finding lecturers who really knew their topic inside out and had a passion for their subject.

**Life in practice**
The combination of Danny Chambers, Ebony Escalona and recent Liverpool grad Amelia Hutchinson stoked everyone’s interest and passion for veterinary life, something that can sometimes be lost when bogged down with work, life and exams. Their humorous approach and willingness to share embarrassing anecdotes from their experiences in practice emphasised that none of us is perfect, we will all make mistakes and, most importantly, it’s ok if we do!

These kinds of talks are, in my opinion, just as important as the educational ones and it was fantastic to hear afterwards how they had struck a chord with so many students. It was great to hear so many students talking animatedly about their chosen career paths and giggling at their own embarrassing stories. After almost a lifetime of people drilling it into you that you must be perfect, it was an incredible relief for someone to come along and tell us that it’s ok if we’re not!

If you are not familiar with the Facebook pages that Danny, Ebony and Amelia have set up, I suggest you check them out (www.facebook.com/groups/1338928542835883; www.facebook.com/groups/126818623280072.

Whether you’re straight out of vet school or have been in the career years, even if you no longer work in clinical practice, it’s a fantastic support network for all vets.

My final afternoon of the congress was made up of more practicals; first Professor Archer guided us through the procedure of inserting a tracheostomy tube. I can’t emphasise enough how useful this was as the first time any of us are likely to perform this procedure is in an emergency situation; it was nice to have a little heads up on what to do! We then got the rare chance to play with an endoscope, guiding it through a makeshift larynx, shortly followed by suturing practice with Ben Curnow who gave us some handy tips, most notably the ‘Dulux colour chart’ of ‘Hibi’ concentrations showing what dilution should be used for what.

After mostly avoiding needle-stick injuries from suturing, we moved onto nerve blocks led by one of Liverpool’s equine interns Pablo Jimenez who patiently walked us through all the landmarks for various blocks around the eye. (The following week on rotations we had the opportunity to put these blocks into practice and Pablo was practically bursting with pride with high-fives all around when we all remembered his teaching.)

Our final activity of the day was a seminar led by ace equine intern Kim Davies on common colic presentations in first opinion practice, where ‘to refer or not to refer’ was indeed the question.

It’s a good end to any congress when you feel you know more when you come out than when you went in, and even better when you find you’ve learnt things about yourself. I now know for sure I want equine medicine to feature in my future career . . and also that I can make a damn good bacon sandwich at the speed of light when we all got up late after the party on Saturday night!

All in all, the SEVA Congress tested, enhanced and allowed us all to gain skills essential for a veterinary career and I think I can speak for everyone when I say we did a lot, we learnt a lot and we had a whale of a time doing it!
We all need to fight resistance

Meg Rawlins (4th Year, RVC)

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is currently one of the biggest threats facing modern society, and could potentially have devastating impacts on both human and animal health. As veterinary students we will play a large role in tackling this complex global issue in the future, whether through ensuring appropriate antibiotic use in first opinion practice, in a policy role or through research.

On October 27 last year, I was lucky enough to attend a conference, ‘Antibiotic resistance – facing up to the AMR challenge’, organised by the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance (RUMA) in association with the Veterinary Medicines Directorate.

RUMA was established in 1997 with the aim of producing a coordinated and integrated approach to best practice in animal medicines use and promote high standards of food safety, animal health and animal welfare in the British livestock industry.

One Health approach
What struck me most about the conference initially was the variety of backgrounds of the delegates, who included directors of farmers’ unions, people from major retailers, veterinarians and human health professionals. Not only was it inspiring to observe such a diverse range of people coming together to address AMR, it also called attention to the interdisciplinary One Health approach needed to combat this incredibly significant issue.

One Health was a major theme throughout the day. Lord Gardiner (parliamentary undersecretary of state for rural affairs and biosecurity) got the conference off to a great start by emphasising the need for One Health action. He discussed the links between animal and human health and AMR, and how we need to tackle the concerns of antibiotic use in agriculture from farm to fork.

Professor Paul Cosford, director for health protection and medical director for Public Health England, further highlighted the collaboration between the medical and veterinary professions. The phrase ‘gateway to antibiotics’ was used to describe veterinarians, and this term can be applied across the board to other medical professionals, emphasising that we all have a role to play in reducing the use of antimicrobials.

The afternoon session consisted of members of RUMA’s Targets Task Force discussing the work they had done to determine targets for antimicrobial use in the different livestock sectors. The group consisted of veterinarians and farmers who had worked to produce guidelines and set goals to reduce antimicrobial usage across the different sectors. These guidelines have since been released and are available to read.

What fascinated me most about this part of the conference was how RUMA emphasised the relationship between farmers and veterinarians, making it a two-way conversation. Opening communication between the two groups can allow for sensitive issues to be discussed, such as encouraging farmers to change practices. This is perhaps something we, as the next generation of veterinarians, should be exploring further.

Animal welfare and AMR
Concern has been expressed by some in the farming and veterinary sectors that a reduction in use of antimicrobials will have a negative impact on animal welfare.

Christianne Glossop (chief veterinary officer for Wales) addressed this point head on. She focused on how veterinarians can work with farmers to produce effective herd health plans and help improve management; this can reduce the use of antimicrobials in livestock while improving animal welfare. She also suggested how schemes such as the bovine viral diarrhoea eradication programme can help maintain the balance of reducing the burden of disease, improving animal welfare and reducing the usage of antimicrobials.

A variety of videos shown throughout the day also presented the successes of various welfare interventions at a herd level that had helped increase production and decrease antimicrobial usage.

Achievements already
Over the past two years, sales of antibiotics for use in livestock have reduced by 27 per cent, exceeding a target set by the government.
Figures from the Veterinary Antibiotic Resistance and Sales Surveillance (VARSS) report for 2016 were released at the conference and showed that overall sales dropped from 62 mg/kg to 45 mg/kg, while sales of the highest priority critical antibiotics also fell. Sales are at their lowest recorded levels since records began and the pig sector, which uses the highest amount of antimicrobials compared to the other sectors, has made good progress, with a 34 per cent drop in antimicrobial use in general and a 73 per cent decrease in use of critically important antibiotics.

**Take-home messages**
These are very promising figures, but there are still many steps that must be taken. Through collaboration, education and advocacy, RUMA has made significant progress, but it cannot do it alone. There are still major challenges that need to be tackled, such as the barrier between vets and farmers, as well as maintaining high animal welfare standards.

Nigel Gibbens (the UK CVO) reminded us to not forget the impact of AMR in companion animal and equine practice, as well as resistance to other drugs such as anthelmintics. Regardless of whether you work with small or large animals, AMR affects all disciplines within the veterinary field.

The reality is that, despite our efforts, AMR cannot be resolved overnight. Attempts to reach the proposed targets for each sector are still falling short. It is going to require hard work, collaboration and education to achieve this and we, as future veterinarians, will be at the forefront of this change in use of antimicrobials.

I would encourage you to read the VARSS report, the RUMA Targets Task Force report, the O’Neill review of AMR and other publications about AMR and consider what we, both individually and collaboratively, can do to mitigate the effects that AMR can have on our society.

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**Developing veterinary leaders**

**Christina Paish (4th Year, RVC)**

Every January, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) holds its annual Veterinary Leadership Conference in downtown Chicago. The aim of the conference is ‘to develop leaders for the benefit of the individual and the veterinary profession’ and students from AVMA-accredited vet schools around the world are invited to attend.

Thanks to scholarships from the Student American Veterinary Medical Association (SAVMA), three of us from the UK (myself from RVC, Catherine Corbett from Edinburgh and Olivia Thompson from Glasgow) joined students from vet schools in Canada and the Caribbean, as well as the USA, to brave temperatures of ~16°C(!) for a jam-packed five days of exploring Chicago and participating in leadership development workshops.

**What is the VLC?**
The Veterinary Leadership Conference (VLC) handbook explains that the meeting comprises AVMA governance meetings, continuing education sessions focused on leadership development, and networking opportunities. Its purpose is ‘to equip veterinary professionals at all stages of their career for personal and professional leadership that will benefit both the individual attendee and the veterinary profession’.

**My experience at VLC**
Over the course of the meeting I met countless amazing veterinary professionals from around the globe; from students and new graduates looking for careers advice, to practice owners and leading researchers attending to develop their management skills. At every breakfast/lunch/dinner everyone was encouraged to meet as many new people as possible and share their experiences, which was excellent for collecting endless words of wisdom, top tips for rotations and business cards!

As students we were lucky enough to participate and voice our views in several forums for debate – topics discussed this year were national veterinary practices, delivery of care by not-for-profits and defining the veterinary-client-patient relationship.

The session I attended was discussing not-for-profits and I was struck by the lack of means testing in most US states, meaning low-cost veterinary care can be accessed by anyone, leaving private practices feeling short changed. The chair, after noticing I was from the UK, called on me to explain to the committee how means testing is used in Britain and to argue why it should be implemented to benefit both clients and veterinarians.

The majority of the weekend was spent attending workshops and talks focusing on leadership, communication and managing a work-life balance. For me it was the perfect preparation before starting rotations and it was so refreshing to hear experienced vets sharing their difficult experiences and passing on their advice for student life and beyond.

Overall, the conference was a brilliant way to kick off 2018. In addition to the beautiful four star hotel, American hospitality and Chicago-style pizza, I also met friends for life and mentors who both inspired me and gave me invaluable skills to take away, as well as contacts for future EMS placements.

I would encourage all students to go looking for hot topics and new policies, to have an opinion and find out how they, as students, can have their say!
The first Liverpool BSAVA student conference

Lauren Witter (4th Year, Liverpool)

On January 6 and 7 this year, we hosted the very first Liverpool BSAVA student conference at Leahurst. It took months of preparation, but proved to be a very successful small animal conference.

The aims of the conference were to:
- Develop key day 1 skills through provision of hands-on practicals;
- Respond to student feedback and fulfil teaching desires;
- Optimise the transition from vet school to professional life;
- Provide resources that support mental health and wellbeing;
- Assist the pursuit of various career paths in small animal medicine.

The programme consisted of lectures, practicals and workshops, to give undergraduate Liverpool vet students the opportunity to develop their skills through interactive case discussions and hands-on opportunities. A wide variety of small animal clinical subjects and disciplines were taught across the two days to almost 100 student delegates by fantastic internal and external speakers.

On the Saturday evening, we hired a marquee and provided the delegates with a lively evening of live music from Izzy Poveda, The Definite Article and One Dissection!

On behalf of the Liverpool BSAVA student committee – Chris McKay, Steph Gowing, Rachel Turner, Becky Sedman, Jane Paddison, Charlotte Rutter and myself – a huge thank you to all our speakers, who delivered fantastic teaching resources and shared their knowledge and enthusiasm for a variety of subjects including: endoscopy, emergency critical care, rabbit neutering and dentistry, orthopaedics, diabetes management, ultrasound, cardiology, neurolocalisation, anaesthesia, cytology and toxicology, ocular emergencies and intracranial disease, communications, behaviour, wildlife and reptile medicine, abuse and resilience and more. We had great feedback from the delegates and many students said the sessions made them feel more confident with day 1 competencies.

We had many generous sponsors that offered financial and other support. Thank you to our platinum sponsor Hills, our gold sponsor Medivet and all the other fantastic companies that made the conference possible!

Throughout the weekend, we also had exhibitor stands across campus to provide resources and information to the delegates. Companies and organisations including Vetlife, PetSavers, Vets Now, Veterinary Christian Fellowship, BVLGBT+, NVS, Webinar Vet, Behaviour Referrals and more attended the conference and we thank them also for their kind support. Food was also provided to the delegates throughout the whole weekend by a wonderful catering company.

Finally, thank you to the University of Liverpool for allowing us to host this fantastic conference; the Liverpool BSAVA student committee are over the moon that it turned out to be huge success and this is definitely going to be the first of many!
Since 2009, veterinarian Dr Nigel Hicks and his wife Sara Fell Hicks have been working with orangutans in Borneo. Initially Nigel and Sara raised money through friends and family in order to personally take veterinary provisions to rescue centres in Malaysia and Indonesia and while at those centres provided veterinary expertise and mentoring. By 2014 their dedication and hard work was so vital they decided to found the charity Orangutan Veterinary Aid (OVAID) in order to provide a more formal basis for their endeavours.

Why is OVAID necessary?
All three species of orangutan are critically endangered due largely to the rate of deforestation in Indonesia and Malaysia. Agriculture, logging, mining and palm oil are responsible for the reduction in orangutan habitat. It is estimated that 5.5 million acres of rainforest are destroyed every year in Indonesia for palm oil.

Destruction of the rainforest means remaining orangutans find themselves trapped in pockets of forest where resources are few and far between and as a result they venture into areas populated by humans where they risk being killed for crop raiding. They face further threats from the illegal wildlife trade; mothers are shot and their babies are taken to be sold and kept as pets.

As a consequence, rescue centres, such as International Animal Rescue, Centre for Orangutan Protection, Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme and Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation, are in need of support in order to rescue, rehabilitate and release orangutans that are victims of these circumstances and ultimately prevent their extinction. To date OVAID has supported all of these centres by providing a standard of veterinary care and equipment that they had previously lacked.

Nigel and Sara were kind enough to take time out of their busy schedule running OVAID to answer a few questions for this article:

Q: What drew you to orangutans?
A: A lifelong interest in orangutan stemmed from my time in Singapore where I grew up as a child, but it took until I was semi-retired before I saw one in the wild. In 2009 I undertook a volunteer programme with the species in Malaysia and on my return to the UK I was offered the position of temporary veterinary surgeon at the Malaysian rescue centre; luckily my wife Sara expressed the same enthusiasm that I have for this sentient charismatic creature.

This fascination is no surprise when you encounter orangutan like Anekara. Following difficult but successful surgery to repair her fractured femur I flew back to the UK at the end of a tour of duty in the hope that all would be well. Returning some six months later, while trekking in the forest close to the centre, I encountered a large male orangutan accompanied by a female. As they entered the clearing I viewed the large male with some trepidation but he was too intent on searching for food; the female, on the other hand, crossed towards me without hesitation, sat down beside me on a fallen log and promptly showed me the scar on her femur where I had performed surgery the year before. With an experience like that, who could not be drawn to orangutan?

Q: How did you adapt your previous veterinary experience to working with orangutans?
A: While the orangutan’s anatomy is more similar to humans, most orangutan medical problems can be adequately addressed with first principle medicine and adaption is relatively easy. Tropical medicine must be learned but the broad experience of medical and surgical skills which we all acquire from general practice is hugely beneficial.

I always encourage students to gain valuable general mixed practice expertise after qualifying before rushing into wildlife medicine – difficult for the eager new graduates to curb their enthusiasm for travel and exotic animals, but invaluable for when they do get into the field.
The ability to think outside the box and to adapt to testing conditions with limited resources will be the orangutan vet’s biggest asset.

**Q:** What are the challenges of working in Indonesia?
**A:** High temperatures, 90 per cent humidity, minimal equipment, out-of-date limited medication, unreliable or absent laboratory diagnosis, a ubiquitous mañana attitude and no cheese!

**Q:** Highest high and lowest low?
**A:** Highest high: Seeing Eyos a long-term resident female orangutan (who had suffered several stillbirths and many years caged up) released to the wild and seeing her adapt, relish her freedom and give birth to a viable baby deep in the forest and free.

**A:** Lowest low: Walking through the rescue centre and seeing long-term, unreleasable orangutan staring morosely from small cages day after day after day, knowing that they have 20 more years of hopeless incarceration to endure before death releases them.

**Q:** Where do you see OVAID in future?
**A:** Continuing its very necessary day-to-day role of supplying and upgrading essential veterinary equipment for the rescue and rehabilitation centres and raising public awareness of the plight of the orangutan. Most importantly though, leaving a long-term legacy of creating improved skill sets and learning for the Indonesian orangutan vets who are the hope for the future of orangutan welfare long after we are gone.

**Q:** How can vet students help?
**A:** Due to the nature of our activities, working under the auspices of other NGOs’ rescue centres, we are regrettably unable to offer practical placements for students. Nevertheless, we encourage students to pursue their ambition to work with primates as there is an ongoing need for veterinary skills within the conservation movement. Students can help us by raising awareness of the plight of the orangutan, developing contacts within the university veterinary schools and commercial companies and supporting our efforts with fundraising activities.

- Find out more about OVAID at www.ovaid.org

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**Introducing orangutans**

**Species:** Pongo abelli (Sumatra), Pongo tapanuliensis (Sumatra) and Pongo pygmaeus (Borneo)

**Lifespan:** approximately 45 years

**Size:** males – about 40 inches (1 metre) from top of head to rump; females – about 30 inches (0.75 metres)

**Weight:** males 50–135 kg; females 30–50 kg

**Maternal dependency:** 8–9 years

**Conservation status:** critically endangered

**Habitat:** low-lying peat swamp forest

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**Welfare in a war zone**

**Seth Kennard (JAVS Editor)**

Last October the RVC Student Animal Welfare Society was honoured to host Pen Farthing, former Royal Marine, author and founder of Afghanistan’s only animal shelter.

Afghanistan has been described as a land of overlooked beauty, a place filled with kindness and hospitality. Sadly though this is not how the country is often seen on the news, with the Foreign Office warning of the ‘high threat of kidnapping’ and stating that ‘Travel . . . is extremely dangerous. Seek professional security advice for all travel and consider using armoured vehicles.’

So, consider for a moment how hard it must be to open an animal shelter; to educate vet students from Kabul University, and to turn the tide for animal welfare in a country torn apart by decades of war. Founder and chief executive of Nowzad, Pen Farthing, visited the RVC in October to speak of the challenges and opportunities that come from his work. Starting from scratch, Pen and his team now run Afghanistan’s only official animal shelter, caring for up to 130 dogs, 40 cats and five donkeys. In addition to its shelter work, Nowzad has been working hard on outreach to educate locals and change perceptions.

Pen also spoke of empowering women in a deeply traditional country, with the largest group of female vets in Afghanistan working at the shelter and teaching students from the Kabul veterinary school. Previously, teaching at the university was almost solely textbook-based, but thanks to the classes at Nowzad students now have a chance to perform basic skills on real patients.

A catch-neuter-vaccinate-release programme is slowly making progress on the streets of Kabul and animals not fit for release are rehoused across the world, with many ex-servicemen and women helping to give them another chance.

Nowzad is an amazing charity, and if anyone is looking for a worthy cause to support in 2018 then look no further.

More information on Nowzad can be found on its website: www.nowzad.com/

An article about Nowzad’s female vets – ‘Girls aren’t less than boys: Kabul’s female veterinarians hope to cure inequality’ – was published in The Guardian, 18 September 2017, see www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/sep/18/afghanistan-team-female-veterinarians-hope-to-cure-inequality-kabul
An ‘udderly charming’ little book

Iona Freeman (Web Editor)

The Secret Life of Cows was first published in 2003, but it wasn’t until last year when it was reissued with an eye-catching cover that it became a major sensation, with vet students across the country receiving copies in their Christmas stockings.

The book is a charming collection of personal anecdotes from Rosamund Young and her cattle farm in the Cotswolds. She knows the cows individually and can tell which cow has produced the milk in her tea by the taste alone. The book itself is a beauty and would look good on any shelf; the inside is decorated with a ‘family tree’ highlighting the links that connect her herd and the shared history between her and her cows. Most cows are descendants of the original herd and the names themselves are notable, with Fat Hat, Fat Hat II and Popette being a few examples.

While many of the stories concern determined mothers and missing calves, one of the most endearing is about Meg, calf to Wizzie who, according to Young, ‘told her daughter she was the best and the calf believed her’. Once winter and the inevitable mud set in, Meg is described as hating getting muddy feet and one night managed to climb a flight of narrow steps to the top of a granary store to avoid the mud below. She spent the night in great splendour and then taught two other cows the same trick. After spending many cold days and nights in barns over AHEMS I’m sure many of us can sympathise with Meg.

My favourite story from the book is actually about a lamb, Audrey, and a pig, Piggy (although her full name was Gayle Elspeth Rosie), who were firm friends and would graze together all day. Apparently, if Piggy was late to the meeting point Audrey would go to her sty and wake her up by tapping her with her hoof.

These stories are the real draw behind this book and written in Young’s easy-to-read style, it is an easy book to dip in and out of if you’re busy with university or placements (added bonus: it’s only 133 pages). All the stories are self-contained so it’s great if, like me, you become a part-time reader during term time. It feels at times like a nostalgic Disney film, and is a fascinating account of a unique, organic beef farm in the British countryside.

Young presents a simplistic view of the modern beef industry and I felt there was a bit of subtle condemnation of a ‘normal’ beef enterprise. While I’m sure such enterprises can learn from her, I think she could probably learn from them as well.

The Secret Life of Cows is a great book if you’re looking for a quick read or a present for family, friends, or any bovine buddies you may have. It definitely left me wanting more and with a greater respect for these amazing animals.
BVA overseas travel grants 2018
Veterinary undergraduates in any year, can apply for travel grants to support research projects in developing countries in 2018. Overseas projects can help meet the vet school requirement for students to do research projects (sometimes part of EMS). The awards are worth up to £500 each and a maximum of four grants are available. Applicants should be attending a veterinary school in the UK and must be student members of the BVA. They should be proposing to undertake their own research project which will be of benefit to the country concerned. Projects relating to livestock or other species of importance to overseas communities would be particularly welcomed.
Apply by 5pm on Monday 19 February 2018.

Harry Steele-Bodger Memorial Scholarship 2018
This BVA scholarship is in memory of Henry W Steele-Bodger, BVA President from 1939 to 1941. The scholarship is intended to assist a visit by an individual to a veterinary or agricultural school or research institute, or another course of study or project approved by the governing committee. The award is open to graduates of the veterinary schools in the UK and Ireland who have been qualified not more than three years, and to penultimate and final-year students. The sum available for the 2018 award is expected to be about £1000.
Apply by 5pm on Friday 4 May 2018.

Further information
For application forms and guidance notes, please visit the student pages at www.bva.co.uk

Applicants for both grant programmes must be members of BVA
Find out more about the independent and confidential help that Vetlife provides to everyone in the veterinary community at www.vetlife.org.uk

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