

Speech to the BVA annual Welsh Dinner

Malcolm Morley, President of the British Veterinary Association

Tuesday 27 June 2023 at Cardiff City Hall

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Thank you so much for the opportunity to be here tonight. I'm delighted to have the chance to speak to you all at this special event. I spent many formative weeks at the Styth Vet Group in Aberystwyth, where I was mentored by you. I'm particularly happy that one of the vets who looked after me so well is with us here tonight. Thank you for your mentorship and kindness at that time.

I would also like to welcome Dr Richard Irvine in his new role as Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales. With more than 25 years' experience, Richard brings a wealth of knowledge, and we are looking forward to working with him on some of the key issues facing the profession in Wales.

Veterinary Education

As many of you will know, the veterinary profession has been under significant pressure in recent years, with workforce shortages in all sectors. However, the situation is particularly challenging in rural areas — like much of Wales — where only a limited number of graduates look to work and settle. But the veterinary profession plays a key role in these communities — supporting agriculture, food production and boosting the rural economy.

This shortage of skilled vets demands action, and in the long-run, inclusive veterinary education can play a pivotal role. Aberystwyth University, being the sole veterinary school in Wales, presents a unique opportunity to address this issue. In order to gain a stronger insight into Welsh veterinary needs, they stipulate that at least 50% of their students' work experience must be undertaken in Wales, encouraging them to establish their careers here upon graduation. But for this vital course to flourish, it is essential that it's well funded.

The costs of veterinary education per student are inherently higher compared to other disciplines due to the wide range of clinical and professional skills required upon graduation. But, veterinary courses across the UK are suffering from chronic underfunding, heavily relying on alternative income sources — and this alarming trend threatens the quality and sustainability of UK-wide veterinary education.

To ensure a sustainable future for the veterinary profession in Wales, we urge decision-makers to provide sustainable funding for the veterinary school in Aberystwyth, supporting its growth as a flagship institution. By delivering top-tier education, cutting-edge facilities, and robust research programmes, we can attract, educate and retain a new generation of skilled vets to safeguard animal well-being, and promote the sustainable growth of the Welsh agri-economy. Through a collaborative ecosystem that bridges academia, industry, and the community, the veterinary school will also become a vibrant hub for innovation, entrepreneurship, and knowledge exchange, maximising its value to the veterinary profession and wider society in Wales.

Sustainable Farming Scheme

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I would like to welcome Gwen Rees to her new role as BVA Welsh Branch President. Gwen