



Senedd Petitions Committee

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay

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CF99 1SN

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FUW Written Evidence on The Veterinary Profession in Wales

Thank you for your correspondence enquiring the views of the Farmers' Union of Wales (FUW) on the veterinary profession in Wales.

Over the past twenty years there has been a number of changes in the demands on the veterinary profession sector in Wales. More specifically, with respect to veterinary services for farmed animals, there has been a sizable increase in the regulative demands of animal health and welfare in the guise of disease testing and surveillance.

For instance in 1999 the number of TB tests (both antibody and blood tests) conducted on cattle in Wales totaled 306,382 tests. In comparison, the number of TB tests conducted on cattle in 2023 stood at more than 2 million. This step change in testing, as a result of government policy for TB eradication equates to an increase of 550% in testing requirements alone.

There are many examples in which animal health and welfare incentives have influenced a change in the work demands of farmed animal veterinary services, which include, but are not exhaustive, BVD testing, veterinary attestation requirements for export, sheep scab surveillance testing, pre and post anthelmintic use testing, flock and herd health planning etc.

Many of these initiatives are rightfully designed to improve the health and welfare of farmed animals in which positive outcomes would include a reduced dependence on veterinarians, however, such health planning demands the time of veterinary professionals in an advisory capacity to achieve the best outcomes.

Concern has been raised by members on the reduction of independent veterinary practices in Wales; this observational shift is also supported by the Competition and Markets Authority review which reported that independent veterinary practices have declined from 10% in 2013 to almost 60% of practices now being owned by large companies.

There are both positive and negative reports of this change in structural ownership of veterinary services. Positively, there are opportunities for practices to obtain larger quantities of medicines at cost price allowing for more affordable supply to clients and greater access to new treatments and technology.

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However, reports from members imply that treatment costs have increased substantially within practices owned by larger firms. One member shared that in their experience the more expensive and only treatment route is often advised which includes referrals to other specialist practices within a company, yet when a second opinion is sought by independent practices their treatment options are often more affordable with comparable outcomes for the animal(s) being treated.

In addition, members also felt that it has become more difficult to forge a working relationship with their vet as it is often not possible to be assigned the same vet from larger practices. The consequence of this lack of consistency means that long term or ongoing issues are more difficult and time consuming to overcome as the case has to be explained repeatedly. Farmers value the consistency of the services they receive from the same veterinarian as they would have extensive knowledge of the farm history and livestock system which can often prove beneficial in dealing with longer term animal health issues.

The 2019 survey of the Veterinary Profession reported that most frequently-cited reasons for planning to leave the profession, other than retirement, are poor work-life balance, not feeling rewarded/valued (non-financial), long/unsocial hours and chronic stress. Sadly it has been reported by Platt et al., 2010 that veterinary surgeons in the United Kingdom are three to four times more likely than the general population to die by suicide.

Some initiatives being explored and brought forward to alleviate the work pressure on veterinarians include training paraprofessionals or lay testers to complete routine testing and advisory work. Again, there are advantages and disadvantages associated with the use of these personnel, however, their contribution in alleviating pressure on veterinary professionals are recognised.

It must be noted that on the whole, veterinarians offer a commendable service to farmed animals despite the rising costs of such services.

Yours sincerely,

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