

Future-proofing our association



Neil Blake, who will become president during congress, looks to coordination and integration as key areas for BCVA to develop over the coming year.

IT has been nearly nine years since I arrived at BCVA Congress in Killarney with no greater aspiration than enjoying a few beers with colleagues and learning something from the CPD provision.

Somehow, thanks to the persuasive powers of the black stuff (and some BCVA members – you know who you are), I left Killarney as a BCVA council member with a commitment to focus on the ever-worsening bTB situation. A naïve pledge as I soon found. The politics – both internal veterinary and beyond – have presented massive challenges to delivery of an effective TB programme.

Nevertheless, much has been achieved by the BCVA in those nine years, thanks to the tireless work of board members past and present and thanks in no small part to the brilliant team at BCVA headquarters.

In that time, BCVA has evolved to meet the challenges of the changing veterinary landscape and with a keen eye on strengthening and future-proofing the association so that it is fit for purpose now and in the coming years.

These include the change to a limited company, greater transparency and democratisation of the election of board members, introduction of a flexible approach that enables BCVA members with required skill sets to be called on without the full commitments required as a full board member, modernisation of the BCVA CPD programme and the BCVA website and greater emphasis on interactions at a political level with Government and its agencies to note but a few.

So to the key areas for the coming year.

■ **CPD provision.** The BCVA CPD provision beyond congress continues to be a huge success and much credit must go to Laura Randall and the education team. Close to 600 attendees have benefited from the CertAVP, Foundation and Masterclass courses since the launch of the BCVA DeVelopmEnT CPD programme in 2013. An exciting new development this year has been the BCVA webinars led by Owen Atkinson (free to members), with more scheduled for 2015/16.

■ **Challenges for the cattle sector.** This is a critical time for livestock veterinary businesses. The need for redefining practice business models that assure their viability in the coming years is acute, with the business stream at this year's congress an acknowledgement of this.

The procurement of official veterinarian services is clearly a further catalyst for change and the business challenges show no sign of abating. The concept of public private partnership is not unique to the veterinary sector and could present opportunities, but there must remain an absolute focus on integrated delivery and strategic outcome rather than being motivated simply by treasury requirements for savings.

Within the commercial service provision, the course between competitive advantage and coordinated delivery of strategy must be carefully navigated.

The BCVA has a vital role in supporting where appropriate and challenging where necessary. Its impartiality as an association must be assured so it represents all its members.

I genuinely believe the composition of the board reflects that and have absolute confidence that it will continue to do so in future years.

Focus for next year

It is this that brings me to the focus for the upcoming presidential year, that of coordination and integration.

In the cattle veterinary sector, the BCVA has sought to establish effective and open lines of communication with individual practices and larger groups of livestock businesses. Such dialogue and coordination is essential on areas of universal significance such as antimicrobial resistance, the threat of

decoupling of the prescribing and dispensing of medicines, disease surveillance and effective delivery of both statutory and non-statutory disease control programmes.

In the broader sector and consistent with the theme of integration and coordination, the BCVA has called for an integrated "industry led" body with responsibility for implementation and coordinated delivery of disease control and eradication programmes. The concept has been termed Animal Health England.

There are current drivers in the cattle sector for the

creation of such a body in England, including the planned eradication of bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD), the development of a national livestock database and risk-based trading initiatives. Involvement of the practising arm of the profession will be essential if we are to progress these initiatives. The concept now has support from other key industry stakeholders, including the NFU and the BVA.

The potential benefits of such an integrated body are not unique to cattle nor are they unique to England. Sheep scab and porcine epidemic

diarrhoea virus are the focus of similar disease control and eradication discussions. Scotland and Ireland already have BVD eradication programmes in operation, Wales an integrated approach to bTB. Close integration between devolved administrations is essential, but differing priorities mean a broader integrated Animal Health GB may be an unattainable aspiration.

There remains a vital role for the private farm animal practitioner and it is essential opportunities are identified and farm animal veterinary businesses shape

and influence rather than react to imposed change.

The role of the BCVA amid a rapidly changing and dynamic landscape is critical. Progressive politics is a key objective, ensuring the areas of common and universal importance are identified and strong representation made at all levels to shape the future and to assure our continued role at the heart of the profession.

I hope you all enjoy congress and I look forward to encouraging the next generation of board members to get involved with the BCVA.