

All parts of profession should join a union

Dear editor,

I fear that Nick Blayney continues to show his ignorance of the problems of the average veterinary general practitioner in his comment in the article about Shams Mir's calls for a veterinary union (September 15 issue). "There are young vets who find this job stressful," seems to be a theme that the veterinary organisations keep pushing, thus ignoring the problems that more experienced members face – members, indeed, who have far less support from veterinary bodies. Let's face it, new graduates have far less demands on their time (there are very few graduates with families in tow) and their finances (despite hefty loans, they are unlikely to have immediate mortgages or child-care costs). And even though being let loose on the animal-owning public is daunting for everyone, they have the distinct advantage of being young enough to get out and re-train in a profession that rewards them for their hard work.

As a graduate of 20 years, I have experienced a number of problems in my career, because of what I consider unethical and frequently illegal behaviour in regards to my employment rights. I suspect this is more prevalent in those who have not been lucky enough to find stable, reliable employment from early in their careers and those who take career breaks or move areas; by the law of nature, it's most likely to affect women – a growing percentage of our profession. I have contacted all of the large veterinary organisations in the past (RCVS, BVA, SPVS and the Veterinary Defence Society) asking for help, but I have received none. I have already informed each of what I thought of its service. I believe that the remits of the veterinary organisations severely limit the actions and advice that they can give to individuals, and, therefore, they cannot do the job that a union can. Nor do they, in my view, have the guts to attempt to do so.

So, after two decades, I decided to join a union. In truth, however, such is my lack of faith that – given the opportunity – I would leave the profession that I entered as a vocation. My experiences have taught me that employment law is incredibly weak, especially if you have been in a job for fewer than 12 months. And until employment rights are more closely adhered to in this profession, and employers are obliged by the RCVS to be ethical and moral in their dealings with employees, we need all the help we can get.

I challenge SPVS to conduct a full and proper survey of employment rights within the profession in this country. I also challenge every practitioner who has ever experienced problems with his or her employment rights to deluge SPVS with letters about those experiences: nothing will ever change if you don't. I sincerely hope that there will shortly be such an organisation specifically tailored to the needs of the veterinary profession.

However, until that time, I would advise employees in all sections of the profession to join a union. I read such a message in a veterinary magazine several years ago and even cut out the page, but severely regret not actioning it at the time.

Yours faithfully,

NAME AND ADDRESS SUPPLIED.

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