

Strength in numbers...

YOU'D have to have been hiding under a rock not to have noticed the debate in these pages and elsewhere about a veterinary union over the past few months.

This is not a new debate, but it is a timely reminder to all of us that there is always more that can be done. Let me state from the beginning that we do not think a union is the right way forward.

As a representative membership body, the BVA supports both the veterinary profession as a whole and its individual members. In that way it is very similar to a union: it has strength in numbers. And like a union, veterinary surgeons benefit from much of the BVA's work whether they are members or not.

The BVA already provides many of the services you would expect of a traditional union: free legal advice 24 hours a day, 365 days a year; written help and guidance on a wide range of issues from contracts of employment and criminal record checks to achieving RCVS Practice Standards Scheme accreditation and the new graduate guide; access to discounted insurance and other financial products; access to a support network through the Young Vet Network, including the regional graduate support scheme; discounted training and publications; discounted private healthcare; policy-influencing and lobbying powers with contacts at all levels of government; and arbitration and mediation services through the Veterinary Association of Arbitration and Jurisprudence (VAJ).

Focusing on this last service we know from our legal helpline that many vets face employment difficulties and the recent press stories of vets struggling with their employers should make us feel ashamed. As the shape of the profession changes towards a higher percentage of vets being employed, these problems may become more acute. But by sharing these stories and thinking about the

solutions we can start to move forward. The BVA is already doing a lot behind the scenes in this area.

The BVA's Member Services Group (MSG) – tasked with finding ways to improve the services we offer our members – is investigating how best to provide a conciliation service that genuinely supports and helps vets who find themselves in a seemingly impossible situation with their employers, or indeed their employees.



NICKY PAULL
president of the BVA,
outlines what the
association does for
its members – and
also non members

Managing people

In a published letter, vet Chris Whipp pointed straight at the elephant in the room when he said that many vets need training in how to manage people.

We agree and will be piloting some non-clinical professional development in the new association year (September to September) as well as working with the Veterinary Practice

Management Association to run sessions on contracts of employment – a basic but fundamental part of being an employer.

A union could also take on these roles, but would inevitably require a new structure, with new staff all coming at a cost.

Surely it makes sense for the expertise and enthusiasm of existing groups to move things forward.

For us, a worrying aspect of the current debate is that many vets don't know about the BVA; about what we are doing for the profession and what we can do for them as individuals.

We have to accept that perhaps we haven't been shouting loud enough, or in the right places. But I can assure you we are constantly striving to improve what we do and we welcome input from those who have ideas about how to get there.

We really do have strength in numbers and with that we can do more to support vets and provide better services for a larger number of people. The door is open; I hope others want to join us.

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