



Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs  
Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London SW1P 3JR  
By email: [Secretary.State@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Secretary.State@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

Friday 22 June 2018

Dear Secretary of State

We are writing following the comments made during your oral evidence session with the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee on 13 June 2018. You will be aware that as representative bodies for veterinary surgeons we were deeply concerned by comments that – we felt – suggested EU-qualified vets did not have the same level of qualification as UK-qualified vets.

We note the statement issued by your Department stating that you were referring to meat hygiene inspectors and we appreciate the clarification of your remarks. However, it is not clear why you referred to the nationality of these professionals in your evidence. Even though current recruitment of meat hygiene inspectors is reliant on non-UK EU nationals, the majority of MHIs employed directly by the FSA are actually UK nationals. This information was included in the FSA's own evidence to the Migration Advisory Committee in October 2017.

Many of our veterinary colleagues have been worried about their future within the UK workforce, despite assurances from the government. At the same time, all areas of the veterinary sector have been experiencing recruitment difficulties and there is genuine concern within our profession. In the last few days, our organisations have been contacted by several members who felt personally affected by your comments and who would have appreciated an acknowledgment of the effect it has had on them. It is therefore essential that the language used by politicians and other public figures is carefully chosen so it cannot be interpreted as undermining or denigrating those colleagues who qualified outside the UK.

The use of language such as “full-dress vets” causes quite a lot of confusion by suggesting that there is something other than a fully qualified vet. No such role exists within the UK – you are either a vet or you're not. As you will know, the UK veterinary regulator – the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) – validates veterinary qualifications and every practising veterinary surgeon working in the UK must be registered as an MRCVS.

Since your appointment as Secretary of State just over a year ago, we have welcomed much of your programme and statements – particularly your commitments to high animal health and welfare standards in the UK. However, it is disappointing that you have turned down many offers from the British Veterinary Association to meet to discuss other matters of interest to the veterinary profession. This includes critical issues such as veterinary certification, which was also raised during your oral evidence session, again causing some confusion.

British Veterinary Association  
Patron: Her Majesty The Queen

7 Mansfield Street | London W1G 9NQ

T 020 7636 6541 F 020 7908 6349  
E [bvahq@bva.co.uk](mailto:bvahq@bva.co.uk) W [www.bva.co.uk](http://www.bva.co.uk)

Registered number: 206456 England. Company limited by guarantee



A strong voice for vets

It is essential that as Secretary of State you understand the unique role and value of the veterinary profession in the UK, particularly in the context of Brexit.

BVA would like to extend a further invitation to meet with us to discuss these matters so that we can develop a positive working relationship for the future.

Kind regards,

Three handwritten signatures in black ink are displayed horizontally. The first signature on the left is clearly legible as 'John Fishwick'. The middle signature is more stylized and less legible, appearing to start with 'Rebeca'. The signature on the right is also stylized and less legible, appearing to start with 'Collin'.

**John Fishwick**, President, British Veterinary Association – [president@bva.co.uk](mailto:president@bva.co.uk)

**Rebeca Garcia**, President, Association of Government Veterinarians

**Collin Willson**, President, Veterinary Public Health Association

CC: Christine Middlemiss, CVO