

**Inspiring**  
**veterinary leaders**

**A showcase of**  
**diverse roles and**  
**experience**

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# Message from the President

## Amanda Boag

**V**et professionals are almost invariably all leaders, but we are not always good at recognising and promoting this. The RCVS wants to celebrate leaders from across the vet and vet nursing professions, including both those leading every day in their workplaces, as well as those in traditional leadership roles. We want to highlight our qualities as both people and professionals, and emphasise our need to recognise these qualities and, through that, give us all the confidence to take up leadership roles.

A few years ago, the RCVS began work with the British Veterinary Association on the Vet Futures project to identify where we are now, and where we want to be in 2030. Leadership development was identified as an area that we have not necessarily been brilliant at as a profession. More worryingly, there was evidence that some vets, particularly younger ones, do not see themselves as leaders, or feel comfortable with that term.

That, to my mind, is a missed opportunity, because I believe we as vet professionals absolutely show great leadership qualities: vision, communication, managing change, tolerating uncertainty, and being resilient. These attributes are developed during our training and working lives, and they can equally be applied to

managing and both leading people and organisations, as they are to the clinical settings in which they are forged.

The 12 veterinary professionals we showcase here all display inspiring leadership and demonstrate the diverse roles that exist in vet settings. We hear from senior colleagues like Niall Connell, a wonderful individual who values everybody and listens incredibly well. There are contributions from people at the start of their careers, like Hatti Smart, one of our undergraduates who has done fantastic work nationwide on LGBT+ issues and on homelessness. Both of those people in their different ways have overcome adversity and that is something that contributes to making them very fine leaders in the roles they take up now.

In the academic realm, we celebrate the work of brilliant, experienced leaders at universities like Professor Liz Mossop and Professor Joanna Price, who demonstrate how the skills we develop in the clinical setting can translate far beyond it, in their cases to leading educators and students. Bobby Hyde, doing pioneering work towards a PhD, talks about how the confidence from clinical work and academic excellence can help even a young vet guide clients in a stressful environment.

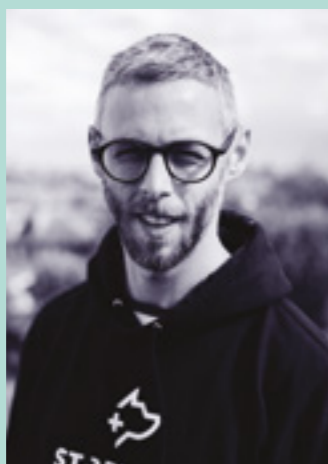
**“The 12 veterinary professionals we showcase here all display inspiring leadership and demonstrate the diverse roles that exist in vet settings.”**

I passionately believe that our professions are not for us but for society: to support animal welfare and to contribute to the greater good by doing that. Ross Allan gives us a fine example of how his work reaches out to a community in Glasgow and plays a positive role in it, while Sam Joseph's StreetVet project with the homeless and their dogs takes what we do back to its most fundamental elements: caring for animals along with the people who depend on them so much. Meanwhile, Sarah Colegrave and Richard Artingstall provide case studies

into how leadership approaches can be successfully adapted to meet the changing world of vet practice, whilst keeping some of the essential elements that have served us well from the past.

There was a time when ours was a hierarchal working world, but that is changing rapidly and we are learning from and working alongside veterinary nurses who offer superb leadership examples. Gemma Irwin-Porter, Victoria Fyfe, and Matthew Rendle demonstrate leadership to nurses and vets alike, and they are passing on their gifts to the people they train and inspire: qualities of unflappability, compassion, and understanding.

In our selection of these 12 people we have shown that leadership is not something that belongs only to those who are senior, or those who wear a fancy chain of office around their neck. We believe leadership is something that is ongoing, and something that can be demonstrated at any stage of a career. We want young vets to know what good leadership looks like, and the confidence to call things out when they are not right. Vets and vet nurses care a great deal about what we do, and this is the time for us to stand up, value ourselves, and tell ourselves and others that we can all lead in important ways. ●



## Inspiring veterinary leaders

## A showcase of diverse roles and experience

In 2018, we launched our leadership initiative with the aim of putting leadership at the heart of the veterinary professions, pursuing this goal creatively and with determination. Prompting this in part were the findings of the earlier Vet Futures project, published in 2015, which revealed concerns about the number and profile of vet professionals stepping forward into leadership roles.

### The leadership programme encompasses three work streams:

- **Leadership for everyone** – this includes the objective of promoting the importance of self-reflection and the development of leadership skills as a key aspect of veterinary professionals' continuing development. It does this by providing resources – such as the RCVS Edward Jenner Veterinary Leadership programme – that can support this aim.
- **Leading the profession** – this seeks to ensure that as an organisation the RCVS is an exemplar of leadership development and is fit to lead the professions.
- **Tomorrow's leaders** – this aims to highlight the diverse range of leadership development opportunities for veterinary surgeons and nurses, the roles and positions that these could lead to, and the impact they could have on the future of the professions.

This Inspiring Veterinary Leaders campaign straddles all of these three ambitions. The honest reflections provided here should be an antidote to the abstract notions of leadership which often fail to capture its true essence. It should also confirm that there is no archetypal leader, leadership role, or traditional route to becoming a leader in our professions. For this reason this series has, for the most part, chosen to shine a light on the types of leadership that take place each day, across the vet landscape, throughout its strata.

A total of 12 veterinary professionals have given up their time to participate whole-heartedly in supporting the campaign's aims. In doing so they have, without exception, spoken candidly about their path into the leadership roles they are now in and we are enormously grateful to them for doing so. ●

# Sarah: leadership via integrity, spotting talent and... ice-swimming

In her first job, Sarah grew in confidence quickly when the partners gave her ownership of specific processes – a feeling of endorsement that echoed memories of childhood empowerment through animal care.

"I grew up in this rather boring upbringing and it felt very claustrophobic," said Sarah. "But an uncle had a dairy farm and it was wonderful to get out there, away from suburban Surrey and just have that freedom and space. Milking cows, seeing calves being born. I just thought it was such a privilege to be involved with animals. Cycling down to the dairy farm at four in the morning when no one else was up: it felt so grown up, so much fun. There seemed to be lots of jobs I could do, and I think as a child that feeling you're useful and achieving something is really powerful."

After graduating from Cambridge in 1989, Sarah went to work for David and Carole Clarke in King's Lynn, at their progressive small animal practice which, she said, "put clinical excellence, integrity and honesty at the heart of everything." They identified talent in her early on and gave her the freedom to grow her skills and lead projects, for instance in laparoscopy. "They had a gift for seeing different people's strengths and letting them develop in those areas," she said.

Sarah became the clinical lead at the

**Sarah Colegrave**, the clinical director of a small animal practice in King's Lynn, explains how she identifies each individual's talents and develops that person by giving them responsibility.

practice, and when David and Carole retired they sold the practice to IVC and Sarah became clinical director. Working for a large group has allowed her to implement her skills across a much greater number of clinical cases than she would be able to see first-hand in practice, for instance, on the IVC Clinical Board and its Patient Safety Committee, the latter of which has led a project to implement an anaesthetic checklist in IVC practices and launched a patient safety award.

Talking of anaesthetics, Sarah likes to unwind with ice-swimming, and has also swum the Channel. "Challenges like that develop you and teach you to get your head in the right place. You fill yourself with positive thoughts and it is incredible how much you can achieve: far more than you thought you were physically capable of."

However, there were stressful elements to being taken over by a corporate. "There was a lot of anxiety among staff around

the takeover, and managing that change. I think the main worry was that we wouldn't feel as if we were Mill House Vets any more. But I don't think our clients would probably know, or, more accurately, would not mind, that we are part of a bigger group because we have kept true to the core values that made the practice what it was."

Those values include giving responsibility and ownership at every level of the organisation, which has 13 vets and 21 nurses and student nurses. "We help people find their roles, give them opportunities to lead bits of the practice as well. You start someone with a small project to get their teeth into, and you build them up and mentor them from there," she said.

"I am doing my surgery certificate at the moment, which keeps me on my toes. The more you learn the more you realise that there's more you need to learn, but I think it's vital for a role model to show that



**"I think perfectionism is a real problem, especially with new graduates who have excelled at all their exams and then come into the real world where things can't always be done to perfection."**

continual learning is really important."

Sarah also has a creative leadership approach to a challenging character trait identified by many vets and those who work with them.

"I think perfectionism is a real problem, especially with new graduates who have excelled at all their exams and then come into the real world where things can't always be done to perfection because of finances or whatever. That can be very difficult for some people. Perfectionism sounds great but people like that do need support when they first start. I mean, it's absolutely great to find goals and go for them, but I think we've got to manage people when things don't go quite so well also."

Sarah has a solution for that in the practice. "We have reflection meetings, where we will all get together to talk about difficult and interesting cases. We have developed a system to make this a positive learning experience: not 'what went wrong?' but 'what have you learned?' And we have prizes every six months for the best-presented case. But I can't take credit for this, it was my colleague Rhiannon Jones who came up with the idea. She's very good at leading those kinds of things." ●

*Sarah Colegrave MA VetMB BSAVA  
PGCertSAECC MRCVS, Clinical Director,  
Mill House Veterinary Vet Surgery and Hospital*

**Professor Liz Mossop** is Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Student Development and Engagement at the University of Lincoln. She says an early-career mentor set the tone for her on how to learn and teach.

**Liz: leadership requires trust – and learning to know what you don't know**

“I always loved animals, but I'm a people person and my mum used to say to me 'if you don't become a vet you can be a good social worker'. And I realised pretty quickly once I started working as a vet that, actually, a social worker is what you are in some respects, as animals are such an important part of our lives.”

Born in Lincolnshire, Liz trained in Edinburgh, where an early role model impressed on her the leadership style and belief in education that still inspires her today as a Fellow of the RCVS.

“As a student I did EMS placements at a small animal practice run by a vet called Viv Long, and she was incredibly inspiring. This was in the late 1990s, and I don't think I clicked at the time how unusual it was to have a female practice owner in that position, because it was quite a substantial practice.

“She was just the most enthusiastic, engaging person, brilliant with clients, and I think that was when I started to realise that it was all about the people. She just had a veterinary degree, she didn't have complex diplomas or anything like that, but she had such an amazing rapport with her clients. They were loyal to her to the end. The way she managed her staff and the way she treated her clients with such great respect and kindness was hugely inspiring to me.”

Liz saw in Viv a mentor who embodied all the qualities she would later seek to demonstrate to her own students.

“She led by example, and I suppose that was the first time I really saw that happening up close. I'm sure she didn't realise this, but she very much 'role-modelled' those values and behaviours and I was overwhelmed by that experience. It was very inspiring.”

Moving down to Nottingham, Liz started teaching nurses when she was in

her second job, as well as helping clients understand the conditions their animals might have. These combined to awaken a lifelong passion for education.

She did a Master's and later a PhD in clinical education at Nottingham University, where she remained to join the faculty of the new vet school there.

Now she is at Lincoln overseeing student development across all departments, and it is the broad range of skills that the profession has given her that made this busy and far-reaching role

**“Good leaders embed reflection in their day-to-day activities, always looking to lead more effectively and inspire others.”**

a natural destination beyond day-to-day clinical practice or teaching.

“I think vets make good leaders because if you think about where our profession came from – farriery – it was hands-on, problem-solving, and that's true to this day. We are a profession that has such a broad and diverse range of skills, we have to learn about multiple different species of animals and think on our feet to apply knowledge. And you have to know your own limitations and go and look stuff up, and ask others, when you need help.

“If I didn't know the answer to something as a vet, I was always honest with my clients and I told them. But they also knew for sure that I was working my absolute hardest on finding out. You build trust that way. And that way, if the wind blows stronger and things get tricky, you have got a solid foundation of a relationship and people will trust you and believe in you.”

Liz believes that the skills and relationship-building she learned, and was shown, as a young vet can translate across all fields of human interaction and learning.

“So now I have this slightly weird job where although I only directly manage a small number of people, I lead a huge number across the whole institution, and that works because of trust. I put trust in people and I hope and believe that they put trust in me. I will build a relationship with people and encourage them to try new teaching or learning techniques, do something a bit differently or take a bit of a risk, and they will be far more likely to do so because of a trusting relationship.”

Liz identifies another impact on her own leadership development: a firm belief in the power of education. “As leaders we need to learn how to lead. Some skills come more naturally than others, but there is always room for improvement, and good leaders embed reflection in their day-to-day activities, always looking to lead more effectively and inspire others. It's only later in my career that I've seen how important this is, and it is something that many female leaders, I think, 'role model' very well.” ●

*Professor Liz Mossop BVM&S PhD  
FRCVS, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for  
Student Development and Engagement at  
the University of Lincoln*

# Niall: from adversity to diversity and positivity

Incoming RCVS president **Niall Connell** explains how a life-changing medical diagnosis changed his career for the better.

**T**o 'appreciate every day as it comes'. This is one of the simplest pieces of life advice to understand, but perhaps one of the hardest to master. Niall Connell, an RCVS Council Member and incoming RCVS President, has had a journey of inspiring highs, and some tough breaks as well. He has wrapped them all into a leadership style that prizes diversity, learning from colleagues of all ages, determination, and gratitude.

"My father was a firefighter in Glasgow, our family worked in the Clyde shipbuilding yards," he said. "Dad was at the Cheapside Street whisky bond fire in 1960, in which 19 service personnel lost their lives. He decided it was time to do something else, and trained as a teacher.

"He was just embarking on that new career, when he dropped dead at 45. Heart attack. I had just started at vet school, I was 17. Something like that, it changes you: you don't maybe realise at the time but you do come to think you have an expiry date. I thought that would be aged 45. You really do learn to

appreciate every day."

At 22, Niall was a working vet with a son (and two more children soon on the way), and while he thinks that the rigours of training mean that vets today are "much more able and qualified" than he was, he believes he developed early the sense of perspective that family life can bring. He worked in small animal practices in Fife and London, and then back to his home city, where he was senior veterinary surgeon at the Glasgow East PDSA Petaid Hospital for 15 years.

In 2003, in his early 40s, he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. "It came about quite suddenly. There were some signs, looking back, that I probably hadn't followed up on. I just assumed I had a brain tumour, so I was actually quite pleased when I was told it was something like MS. I thought, 'okay I'll take that'. Again, it's funny because in the hospital that night there was some poor chap in the room next door and he was making this horrible noise and I said to the nurse, 'what's happening there?'

She said, 'oh, that chap's got throat cancer.' I realised then there's always someone worse off, always. I think I've had quite a good outlook on life and I'm quite positive."

Niall carried on working for the next six years but it became physically tough. "I thought that was it, game over. It'll be me playing the PlayStation for the rest of my life." But a chance conversation in 2009 opened up an entirely new direction.

"A veterinary nurse, Lissann Wolfe, asked me to help out doing a professionalism seminar at Glasgow vet school, and I ended up doing bits and pieces there, assessing practical exams, assessing online portfolios. I did a bit of volunteering at the local hospital, and that was interesting because it makes you realise how your vet passport is transferable, you have skills that other people recognise, outside this strictly veterinary environment. I also did a stand up comedy course for people with chronic ill-health, which is hilarious since I can't actually stand. And then I heard

about some changes that were going on with the RCVS Council, and I thought I'd like to be a part of that."

Niall is a proud chair of the diversity and inclusion group at the College, and will focus his presidency on continuing the work of Amanda Boag and improving

the diversity of the profession to reflect the wider public. He is also keen to make sure there are many different types of role model for aspiring vets to look up to and learn from.

"The world is changing," he said. "Some of the young people we work

**"We need to bring a wholeness to our work, which will make things more productive and also more fulfilling."**

with, they have different values and priorities, and those priorities are not wrong. We need to bring a wholeness to our work, which will make things more productive and also more fulfilling. We want people to have long, fulfilling careers, and it is not the linear pathway it once was. When I first qualified 180 years ago, you were effectively in a tunnel and you stayed in it until you retired. That has totally changed.

"Ironically, I'm now ill-health retired, I've got a wee portfolio of things to do. It's a far more healthy, interesting way of going about things. And in my case that actually happened because of MS, so therefore I cannot hate my illness because it's opened up all these opportunities and all these experiences. I never actually thought when I had to give up work that the highlight of my career was yet to come, and it's now, which is amazing." ●

*Niall Connell BVMS CertSAO MRCVS, Incoming President 2019-2020, RCVS*

## Gemma Irwin-Porter

leads a team of 27 tutors who are responsible for the pastoral care of student veterinary nurses at the University of Bristol.

**N**urses at Bristol who need a role model for how to cope with moving away from home, dealing with academic pressures and unlocking the resilience needed to manage four years of further education, need look no further than their programme tutor: Gemma has walked that very path herself.

"My granddad had a farm, and I grew up around animals, so I was used to the rural life, but it was still a shock to the system going to the University of Bristol because we were way out in Langford in Somerset. There wasn't really much out there and there were just eight of us doing nursing so you had to get on with each other!



"These days the vet nurses are in Bristol and much more integrated into the university, but I think those issues of being 18, being away from home, having an academic workload, EMS in the holidays, those pressures are still the same. I've been able to relate to my students throughout my career because I know how it feels to move away from home and suddenly be faced with a four-year professional programme."

For Gemma, a key concept in training and leadership has been resilience: showing that in her own life and work, and instilling it in the nurses at Bristol. There are currently 38 in the first year, and plans to grow that to 50, with Gemma and her team passionate about training them not just in veterinary nursing, but also equipping them for broader life challenges.

# Gemma: turning nurses into leaders via pastoral care

"There were two figures in my own development who really stick in my mind: Sue Badger and Andrea Jeffery, who both taught me at Bristol," she said. "They were both pioneers in veterinary nursing and very inspirational veterinary nurse educators. They taught me the importance of treating every animal individually, and a lot about professionalism and resilience. And they inspired me to become involved with education."

"Andrea is very strong, dynamic, empowering. She is passionate and confident. Sue is more reflective, quieter. Their very different personalities show up in their leadership styles, and I try to blend the two of them in my own leadership."

Due in part to the work of Gemma and those like her, these are changing times for the veterinary nursing profession and how it relates to other animal-care roles.

"I would hope the nurses I train see themselves as leaders," she said. "Certainly, here at the university and throughout my career of teaching them, I've tried to inspire them to be leaders, so many will go on to be a head nurse or head of section or into roles where they need to lead, I think any nurse needs these skills: it might be leading a first-aid situation, or managing a practice."

However, Gemma explained that veterinary nursing has at times in the past had to fight for respect. "I've worked in practices where vet nurses, including myself, have been belittled by surgeons."

**"We're not just teaching them to be qualified veterinary nurses with a BSc. We're also turning them into a manager, a leader, a role model: someone who can educate and inspire others."**

I think that's just because of their lack of understanding of what a qualified nurse can actually do. It can be extremely demoralising for a student to witness that sort of poor working relationship.

"Inter-professional working relationships have improved and a lot has changed in practice. Vets are far more aware of what nurses can do legally and practically and I think use them a lot more. And that is in part because there's more clarity on the role of vet nurses, as well as research looking at inter-professional relationships within the vet profession as a whole."

For Gemma, effective working for vets and nurses alike has to stem from communication and accountability, and she believes that good leadership flows from these – and poor leadership from their absence.

"I've seen some pretty poor leaders in my time in education: autocratic leaders who are very authoritarian, pretty much looking out for themselves and not working as a team," she said. "I've also seen some very charismatic leaders who are actually very selfish leaders: they feel they must impose their views on the rest of the team. That made me reflect on the sort of leader I wanted to be, which is supportive, democratic and honest."

Gemma noted that vet nurses have many more options and paths open to them than once they might, be it pharmaceutical companies or research, and also that veterinary nursing graduates have a 100% employability rate.

"We're not just teaching them to be qualified veterinary nurses with a BSc. We're also turning them into a manager, a leader, a role model: someone who can educate and inspire others," she said. In the case of Bristol, Gemma herself is testament to the fact that the system is working very well indeed. ●

*Gemma Irwin-Porter BSc(Hons), RVN, PGCE, Programme Tutor and Teaching Fellow Veterinary Nursing, University of Bristol*

# Hatti: fighting back, and fighting for other people

**H**atti Smart's first introduction to the world of veterinary work might never be added to the suggested curriculum in colleges, but for this emerging young leader, it certainly shaped her view of the profession.

"When I was 12, I was in the stables near where I grew up in Stourbridge and someone came in to say there was a loose horse on the road," she said. "A lady who was out riding had been hit by a car, and the guy had driven off. She had been seriously injured."

"The horse had suffered multiple fractures to his left forelimb: it was completely shattered, and even though I was young I knew it did not look good for him. Even at that age, I was a realist. He was cold because he was in shock, so we wrapped him in a blanket and stayed with him, keeping him calm, for the 25 minutes until the vet arrived."

"The vet who attended, Alistair Field, was amazing: he came in and took charge of the situation but it wasn't like someone swanning in and saying 'oh I know everything'. He just calmed everyone down, he was so good at communicating."

Alistair, who was named vet of the year by *Horse and Hound* last year, became a mentor to Hatti more recently and provided her opportunities for

From attending a traumatic equine accident at 12, to fracturing her skull on her 18th birthday, to nationwide recognition as an LGBTQ+ leader while still an undergraduate: **Hatti Smart** has displayed extraordinary resilience throughout her life.

EMS. He continues to offer her advice and guidance as she completes her undergraduate studies at the Royal Veterinary College.

Hatti has already had ample opportunities to develop the resilience that she believes is vital to working as a vet, some expected, and others less so.

"On my 18th birthday, my friend dropped me on a concrete floor at my party, and I had a fractured skull through my left ear canal and bled out of my ears for two weeks. When I got back to college they said I had to reapply for another subject because getting in somewhere as a vet wasn't going to happen. So I did a gateway course at RVC. I've had a few little bumps along the way, but they have just made me more determined."

As well as the ability to recover and keep fighting, Hatti believes that setbacks have given her the ability to put herself in the shoes of others.

"I'm an LGBTQ+ person," she said. "I identify as pansexual and I was the chair of National Student Pride. One in four

young people who are homeless identifies as LGBTQ+, so people in those groups are disproportionately affected within the population, and it is thought that this is due to issues around coming out. So we arranged a sponsored sleep out at Camden Campus and raised £2,600 in a week for the Albert Kennedy Trust, which is the UK's leading homeless charity for LGBTQ+ people."

Hatti has also served as the RVC Student Union Welfare Officer and says the issues that touch the lives of young vets might surprise some in the professions.

"Among students at the RVC, I had three people message me the week after to say they're only at that school due to help from charities because they have faced homelessness, before university," she said.

"Mental health is increasingly talked about, and with issues about diversity and sexuality I have found the RVC progressive and forward-moving, but there are financial and political pressures people graduating today face that I don't think

were the same way back when.

"Perhaps people used to grow up with that stiff upper lip attitude, just get on with things, and people might consider that we are the 'millennial snowflake generation' that needs to get a grip. But I think we are better at discussing things and trying to identify solutions."

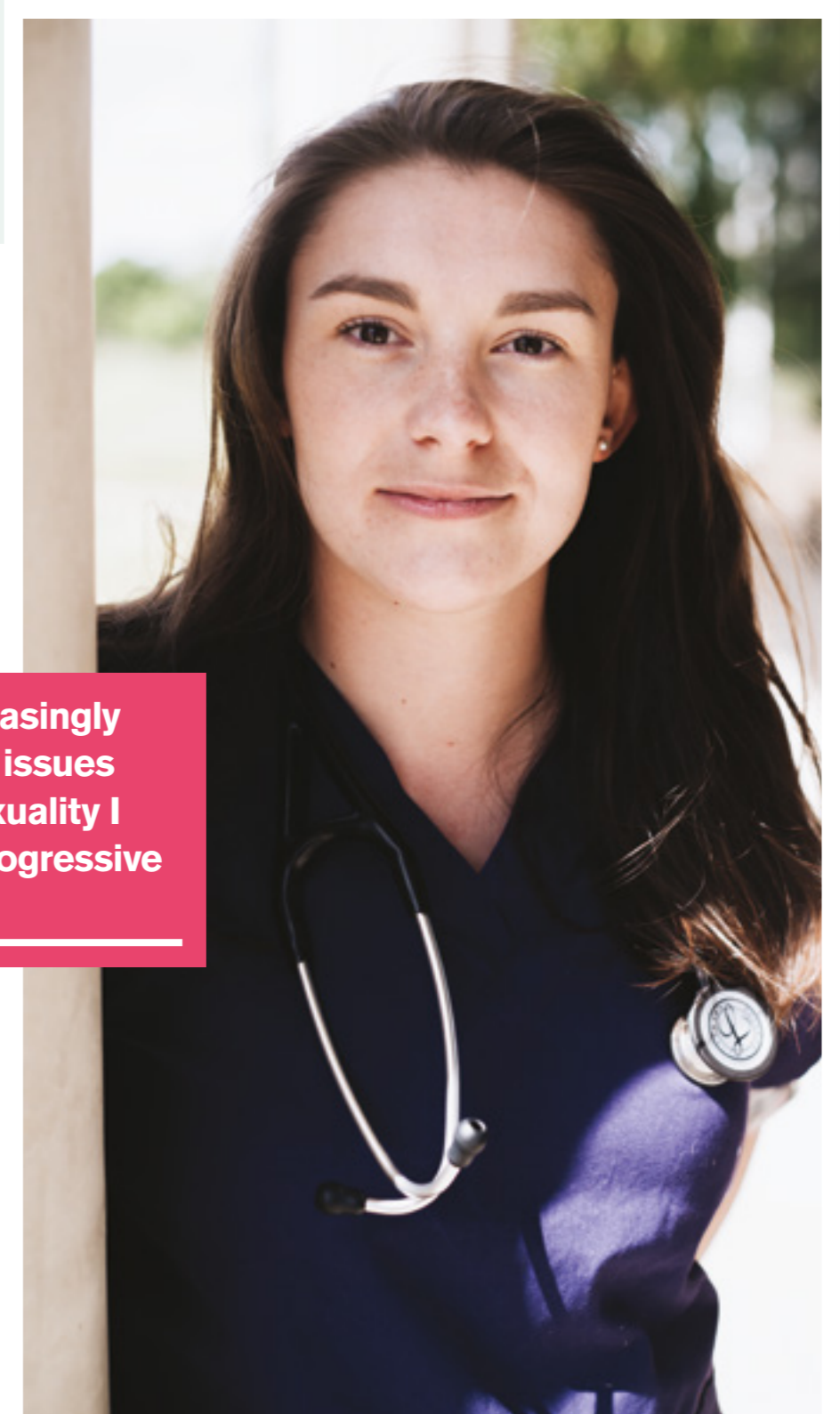
"And we do, because in our profession if you want to get anything changed, you need to show evidence for it."

**"Mental health is increasingly talked about, and with issues about diversity and sexuality I have found the RVC progressive and forward-moving."**

Recognition for that work has come in the shape of the NUS LGBTQ+ Higher Education Award. Hatti has used her roles beyond clinical work and training to develop listening skills that have been combined with empathy and resilience to power a passionate drive for equality.

"For me, wellbeing is a massive part of being a leader and I think the best leaders are people that can identify situations that improve people's wellbeing," she said. "That's been key to everything I've done at the school." ●

*Hatti Smart, vet student, RVC*



# Matthew: from exotic animals to everyday kindness

**Matthew Rendle** was a shy kid who was on a bad path until a creative intervention propelled him into a lifelong fascination with exotic animals, and a career as a somewhat rare species himself: a male vet nurse.

**G**rowing up in Bushey in Hertfordshire, Matthew says that he was bullied and was missing large chunks of school by his mid-teens. “But then I had a really good teacher who could see that I was going off the rails. Mick Swift was his name: he pulled me aside and said have a day off school every week, and just go and find something you enjoy, and think you might like to do as a job.”

Matthew loved snakes and lizards, and had kept reptiles since he was young. A family friend got him work experience in The Park vet practice where, as luck would have it, there was some interest in exotics. It proved to be the making of him. “I saw the nurses and saw how amazing they were and saw all the cool stuff they did, and I stayed there for a year on day-release. I did my GCSEs and then they offered me a position as trainee nurse.”

He fitted right in at a practice where partners Chris Sander and Bill Starr were both supportive, and passionate about bird and reptile care respectively, and Matthew was particularly struck by how they trusted him to take on responsibilities. Matthew started there in 1989, became senior theatre nurse in 1994, and then what looked like a dream job came up at a world renowned zoo in

2003. “It was a great job in wildlife and exotics nursing: there were so many fascinating cases, and the job came with a lot of kudos and status. I was well-respected, I’d done lots of really cool things. I had loads of that kind of adulation. But you can end up getting swept along in a job like that and it took me a while to realise that it was compromising my wellbeing,” he said.

Matthew, 46, was not in a good place and decided that he had to leave the Zoo. But, unhappy though this period of his life was, for him he believes that it has given him empathy, insight and emotional intelligence that he can bring to bear as

**“Emotional intelligence, it’s not something you get taught how to have. It is a hard thing to acquire.”**



he leads a team of 25 nurses in a busy practice in Leeds today.

“I work with a great bunch of nurses, and there is a huge amount of diversity within the group. They have a lot of the worries and the angst that I had in training at the start of my career, but there are additional pressures on them too. Where we used to have little green books that you would get your progress signed off in, now with social media they can all contact each other and measure their progress, how they are doing against each other, and that – even though people are not doing it deliberately at all – creates stress.”

Matthew sees it as part of his role to encourage and to monitor the team’s progress, not just clinically but in the broader pastoral sense.

“This is not a straightforward profession: some people glide across it and it never really affects them, but a lot of people struggle with it. I have learned from my own experiences that everybody deals with situations differently. So for instance, somebody who is consistently late, instead of saying ‘why are you always late?’, you ask them ‘are you okay?’ And then they might open up about what is going on. But emotional intelligence, it’s not

something you get taught how to have. It is a hard thing to acquire.”

There are not many male veterinary nurses in the UK: Matthew was in fact just the 23rd to qualify. He would like to see advances made to rectify that imbalance, and sees it as part of his role to communicate to the Veterinary Nurses Council of the RCVS, of which he is a Council Member, the preoccupations and concerns of in-practice vet nurses.

“It can be tough at times being in such a minority. It’s silly things you remember, like I was the only boy in my exams so they had to get a special invigilator just in case I needed to go to the toilet. At the beginning of the exam, when I’m nervous and self-conscious anyway, and the examiner shouts ‘Matthew? Matthew? Where’s Matthew?’ Then she said, ‘oh, Brian’s here’ and there was this old guy in a tweed coat. ‘Brian’s here. If you need to go to the toilet, Brian will go with you.’”

Matthew declined that opportunity, but today continues to change preconceptions and nurture the nurses around him, male and female alike. ●

*Matthew Rendle RVN, member of VN Council, Head Nurse, Holly House Vet Hospital*

# Sam: touching the lives of homeless people by providing vital pet care

**S**am might not have taken the most traditional route into veterinary practice, but the co-founder of StreetVet has found that charity outreach with homeless dog-owners has allowed him to focus on the absolute fundamentals of vet work.

"It strips everything back. I love it and our volunteers love it because it is going back to the fundamentals: being a vet without worrying about finances or insurance, for people who really appreciate our input and whose animals are genuinely in need. Our volunteers use their skillset, which I think is something that vets take for granted. It takes a long time to develop a skillset like ours and it's a valuable thing. And, if you can spend an hour offering that skillset to someone who's in need of it and values the input, that is a really nice thing."

StreetVet began for Sam after graduating from Bristol vet school when he started talking to homeless people in Camden about their pets and then going out with a backpack and a stethoscope and doing what he could for animals in need. He teamed up with Streets Kitchen,

which feeds 1,000 people in London each week and which gave Sam a way into a group who are, understandably, not always the most trusting towards strangers.

Sam began by offering basic services like flea treatments and worming, with microchipping and vaccinations coming later, as well as registering people and their pets and keeping records for drug administration. He explained that, while there were already charities offering pet care to homeless people, some of them ask for proof that people are receiving benefits, which can be problematic for pet owners who have no address.

Sam added: "There are also psychological barriers for some people. There are so many reasons that people sleep rough, but a lot of the time they find it very difficult to function in a 'normal' setting, in busy places or in official-seeming places. I found loads of people who really wanted care for their dogs but were put off from going."

By coincidence, it turned out that another vet, Jade Statt, was piloting a similar programme in another part of

**Sam Joseph** of StreetVet has grown a project that started out with chatting to rough sleepers about their dogs, into a programme that operates in 15 British cities and has a volunteer army of 450.

the city, and doing it under the same StreetVet name. Happily, they teamed up, and today are the brains and heart behind an organisation that treats hundreds of pets a year. Goddard Veterinary Group offer them five free procedures each month, and they also benefit from pro bono partnerships with Medivet and Vets4Pets.

Sam said that growing social media presence propelled them to "win a competition through Animal Friends Insurance company with a £100,000 prize that will keep us going for a while and means we can pay for something if we need to." They have worked on some amazing cases, including Mick and his dog Bell, a Staffie who was found in a bin and was later hit by a train – but miraculously survived, albeit minus an eye and a leg, thanks to StreetVet.

Jade remains as CEO, while Sam is a trustee, watching with pride as something he set in motion takes flight, but also needing to take time for his day job. Having done a zoology degree and worked in London Zoo as a reptile keeper, he started at Bristol vet school aged 24 and



now works in Highgate for Village Vet. Standards there are high, and in contrast to the StreetVet client group, many clients have the money or the insurance to pay for premium services.

"People are saying there are double the numbers of people on the streets since 2010, which is pretty shocking," he said. "I think StreetVet is a way to build a community feel, starting with professionals who are based on the high street, to try to bridge the gap between people who would never cross paths otherwise. Because that divide in society is becoming wider."

Sam laughed off questions about leadership, and said: "I feel I'm a bit of an impostor if you ask me that. I suppose I've just tried to lead by example. Trying to do things properly, and trying to be as genuine as you can with people. I didn't go into this with any preconceptions of why people sleep rough or cynicism about who they are."

"I really just wanted to be able to have an hour-long chat with someone

**"I've just tried to lead by example. Trying to do things properly, and trying to be as genuine as you can with people."**

and for them to go away feeling a lot more confident that their dog is healthy. The bond that some of these people have with their dogs: they are hugely dependent on each other and these are amazing relationships. I just could see that there was a service that needed to be provided." ●

*Sam Joseph BVSc MRCVS, co-founder of the StreetVet charity*

# Bobby: better leading through communication

**H**ow do you link cutting-edge machine-learning research with hands-on cattle practice, and then educating farmers to improve herd health? For Bobby Hyde, still not yet 30 but the author of a growing body of pioneering academic work on antibiotic resistance in dairy farming, the answer is leadership through communication to negotiate with clients in stressful situations and bring them with you by shared decision-making.

Winner of last year's RCVS 'Fellows of the Future' competition, Bobby graduated from Nottingham in 2013, then worked in cattle practice for two years before returning to complete a European Diploma in Bovine Health Management and achieve RCVS Specialist status. Following this, he continued his studies at Nottingham with a PhD.

"I am studying antimicrobial resistance, and we published the first research paper in the UK looking at usage within the dairy industry," he said of a project that sits within the wider scientific ecosystem of the One Health Initiative.

"We currently have 60 farms across the UK gathering data about weight, disease, management, what the feed is, what kind of colostrum the calf gets, the humidity in the building, basically everything we can learn and understand about each calf's journey and whether it gets disease or not.

University of Nottingham PhD student **Bobby Hyde** explains the leadership challenges in communicating his groundbreaking antimicrobial research to dairy farmers.

And from that I am using machine learning to tie millions of data points together so we can predict disease and figure out what the management factors are that farmers need to do. This will ultimately result, hopefully, in a bespoke calf-health plan."

Bobby hopes his work can make a contribution to a wider push on reducing reliance on antimicrobials. In 2013 antimicrobial usage was 62mg/ PCU across all species of livestock (62 milligrams of antibiotic used per Population Correction Unit ie kilograms of livestock on the farm at time of treatment). The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) committed to a target of 50mg/PCU by 2018. The veterinary profession has taken the lead in meeting and beating that target: the most recent figures across all livestock species, in 2017, were down to 37mg/PCU.

"That's the science," said Bobby. "The other challenge is then to get farmers to make management changes, to get the work across to them. My core aim with the research is to be able to demonstrate the practical impacts, on the ground day-to-day to farmers. The experience I have had

of being a clinical vet, being on farms and working with people, has hopefully given me the ability to get the findings across.

"After a few years in clinical practice you can get a bit of a feel for what the right clinical thing to do is, but how you actually present that to the farm team is really the make or break and, whether it actually gets enacted or not. On most farms you can wander around them and can often pull out a few things you might do differently. But actually getting the farm team to change their behaviour on that, and getting everyone on the same page, is really the challenging thing, not so much the diagnosis itself. You've got a tremendous leadership responsibility in incentivising a change within that whole farm team – it's not just the farmer, it's also someone who just comes in and works Saturdays and you've got to get everyone to come along with you."

Bobby said that the teaching and practical work at Nottingham had provided a brilliant grounding for the experience of going into farms.

"A lot of the time, you are doing an


investigation or a procedure and being observed, and you have to be confident from the outset, and you need to have a clear direction. Then when you're on a farm, the audience often isn't a positive audience, because people are in stressful situations. You see hard-nosed farmers reduced to tears because you have had to condemn 15 of their prize animals because of bovine tuberculosis.

"Things like that can be quite challenging and the leadership skills you have developed in a clinical setting come to the fore. You have to communicate, you

have to be clear, and the way you do that can make a massive difference. You can't just come in, condemn some animals and then walk off the farm. People are going through a really traumatic time, not just as business owners but as animal keepers. They're obviously emotionally invested as well as financially invested."

Bobby's developing leadership style focuses on collaboration and working with clients, not dictating to them.

"With preventative healthcare, what seems to work well is facilitating and trying to get all members of the team to



**"You have to communicate, you have to be clear, and the way you do that can make a massive difference."**

feel like they're involved in it, feel like they have a stake in it. I find that motivates people a bit more, if you can get the whole team banding together. And if you can facilitate the farm team to come up with management changes themselves, that often seems to have a higher chance of resulting in effective animal health outcomes." ●

*Bobby Hyde BVMedSci BVM BVS AHFEA DipBHM MRCVS, PhD student, University of Nottingham, School of Veterinary Medicine and Science*

# Richard: out of chaos to calm

**L**ike many vets and nurses, Richard has had first-hand experience of corporate takeovers. The first, four years ago at their Gloucestershire practice, was, he said, “the most disruptive experience of my professional life. We were told suddenly on a Thursday morning that the business was being sold and it happened overnight.”

The takeover was stressful for senior and junior staff alike, and the culture that emerged in the new business was also problematic. Some felt that the new owners did not communicate as well as they could have done, which had a negative impact on the teams in terms of the anxiety created. This manifested itself in uncertainty and confusion in terms of personnel and team management. It also put pressure on staff as they aimed to provide a continuity of service and clinical care. As clinical director, Richard had plenty of opportunity to experience the challenges of leading a team where your values are not in alignment with those above you.

In fact, the experience was so unsatisfactory that he considered leaving the profession altogether whilst completing his MBA. But, in an exemplary case of working with what you have, he ended up focusing his MBA on organisational change, using the experience to learn and reflect. Two years later the company was taken over again,

What links leading a practice and hands-on clinical work? For **Richard Artingstall**, clinical director at Vale Referrals, it is the ability to deal with ambiguity without being overwhelmed by stress, and to accept that you will have to make decisions with incomplete information.

but this time the experience was much more positive, partly through what the practice learnt from their experience.

Richard noted that one unintended consequence of corporatisation is that flatter structures tend to emerge. “General practice used to be very hierarchical: with one or two partners leading and others only investing time and energy. However, looking at leadership in veterinary practices now, there tends to be a lot more scope for leaders throughout the organisation. I myself will take leadership from many different people, for instance in a clinical setting, often the nurses are more empowered to make clearer decisions around the status of an animal than you are as a surgeon and so you have to listen to their opinion and their insight.”

In a profession where many former certainties are now in flux, Richard believes a major responsibility for the vet leader is in managing change. “The basics

of change management are that change can create uncertainty and fear that need to be given proper attention. On an organisational level, you need to be able to adapt to the unpredictability that change generates without getting stressed, and without creating conflict, so you can actually maintain and create a positive culture in the workplace.”

Richard points out that veterinary training can be an excellent preparation for the challenges of managing change. “As a leader who has to take decisions, you almost never have complete knowledge in a situation where there is change, but that is exactly the same as being a clinical vet, it's just a different problem.”

Richard had early exposure to the mindset of accepting and working with clinical challenges: when he was younger, he would shadow his father's cousin Chris Artingstall, who was the vet for Bristol Zoo. “It was a tremendously exciting place

for a young student: orangutans, reptiles, pelicans... what's not to like? And it was very formative: how can you take a problem with incomplete information and incomplete facilities and adapt clinical medicine to different species. I later worked for Chris and he was unflappable, and I particularly noticed that he had that gift for knowing when to encourage a junior clinician and let you try things, and when to step in and say 'okay, right, you need to do this like this'.”

Combining that knack for knowing

when and how to guide, with the perspective that the MBA gave him, Richard also provides coaching both inside and outside the vet profession. “Most of the leadership conversations I have through coaching are about how can we lead teams and help them deal with the ambiguity and controlled chaos that we see in vet practice today,” he said.

He believes that the ability to reflect and to accept failure and success in equal measure is vital in encouraging teams to develop their own thought

processes. “We are not great as a group at opening ourselves up to feedback. Vets and nurses can have a tendency to hear feedback as criticism which can be a weakness in us. Perhaps this is because we are trained and developed to think as professionals that we are expected to know the answers, where in reality this is not always true.” ●

*Richard Artingstall BA VetMB MBA  
CertSAS MRCVS, Clinical Director, Vale  
Referrals*



**“Most of the leadership conversations I have through coaching are about how can we lead teams and help them deal with the ambiguity and controlled chaos that we see in vet practice today.”**



## Victoria: from caring for animals to leadership by example

**“I aim to motivate them, to guide them, to give them a role model.”**

**G**rowing up in the North East, Victoria's dad was a marine engineer, but had a major accident when Victoria was five. An explosion at work left him disabled, and changed the family's life. Victoria said they had caring in their family DNA anyway, but friends in the local church “were like a second family, and did so much to instil core values in me, a good grounding and a moral compass.”

As an animal-loving kid, it seemed only natural for Victoria to do work experience at Prince Bishop, the local vet practice, and, working there while at college, she got a contract as a nursing assistant and has never looked back. She became head nurse, and then when the practice was taken over by Vet Partners, she took on an enhanced role. Now she works to help the group meet the Royal College's Practice Standards Scheme by going into different operations to offer guidance and assessment.

A key figure in Victoria's development from thoughtful teenager to a leader and mentor to those around her has been Jacqui Molyneux.

“She was the owner of Prince Bishop and someone who became a role model from the age of 18, when I started there. She is a very strong, independent female, she had a family, she created her own business,” explained Victoria. “She was always very forward-thinking. She would just not let anything stand in her way. A lot of businesses, they do well, then they plateau, but she always wanted to do more, to learn more for herself, to develop and never stagnate.”

Jacqui also spotted qualities in Victoria and gave her the opportunities to grow, sending her on a Rotary Club young leadership course, where

**Victoria Fyfe** knew from an early age that she wanted to live a life that was caring and compassionate, but it was only as she grew up and thrived that she began to understand that she could inspire others and shape the course of her profession as well.

Victoria was named the best student. For Victoria, that sort of independent validation was a big factor in helping her to develop her confidence, and she recalls to this day how impactful such praise can be for a youngster.

“Because it is such a busy profession, it's hard to remember that sometimes all it takes is a ‘well done’ or ‘get in’ to boost someone and let you know that you believe in them,” she said. “And that pays off in the long run: you're better off having one person who really cares than five people who don't want to be there. This is emotional and stressful work, often understaffed, and I think we could improve on the way we support people.”

When the practice was taken over, Victoria had the chance to step up to the business and managerial side, as well as being head nurse. This challenged her to blend her compassion with practical decision-making.

“I think I was probably very naive when I was younger, but as you grow you take the rose-tinted goggles off and you realise that people do have to make decisions that you yourself may not think are caring. You have to accept this is a business. I kept my core values, but there is a balance with realism and compassion.”

There was some surprise at Prince Bishop when the practice was sold, and it was part of Victoria's role to keep spirits up, reassure the team and motivate them. She believes that

the takeover has opened up a lot of opportunities, not least the chance to have an impact on more practices than her home base.

“I'm down to earth and approachable so when I go into practices I hope people can see that they are valued as individuals and that we can help them shine. I am passionate about the development of the veterinary world and believe in practices setting high standards. And especially about the Veterinary Nurse title: I would love to see that protected, more recognition for everything we do, because, as it stands, anyone could call themselves ‘veterinary nurse’.”

“We are front of house, we are empathetic and we deal with grief. We are giving advice to clients with new animals, we are radiographers, phlebotomists and more. In a human hospital that would be four or five different teams of people! People do not understand how much we do.”

Still not 35, Victoria has many goals for how she can further the profession of veterinary nursing, but also keeps her focus on the people around her. “With my nurses, I aim to motivate them, to guide them, to give them a role model. Because I worked my way up from the bottom, so I am here to say to them ‘it can be done’.” ●

*Victoria Fyfe RVN, Practice Standards Manager, VetPartners*

# Jo: leadership is about vision – and strategy to bring people along with you

“I grew up on a smallholding in Pembrokeshire and graduated in 1983 after doing an intercalated degree in anatomical science during my veterinary course at the University of Bristol. From that, I was already quite interested in thinking about research. The vets were taught with the medics and we had a number of very research-active vets who were working in biomedicine. My tutor, Alastair Summerlee, was a very well-known neuroscientist, and he encouraged me to think about careers beyond practice. I think my role models were a bit different to other people's, and that influenced my career choices later on.”

Those career choices included initially going into equine practice working for Peter Scott Dunn – vet to Her Majesty the Queen – from whom Jo learned that there is an art as well as science to the work of a vet, as well as a duty of service to the community. She then moved to Singapore, working in a small animal practice where she was wowed by the quality of the kit and level of innovation, and moved back to Bristol to teach anatomy, with thoughts of undertaking a PhD.

“I was strongly advised by Professor Bridget Ogilvie who was the then-director

**Professor Joanna Price** has combined academic rigour with a passionate belief in the essential leadership quality of vision, that has taken the learning from her veterinary and research career, into a role beyond clinical practice as Vice-Chancellor of the Royal Agricultural University.

of the Wellcome Trust, that I needed to move away from vet school for a bit and get trained in biomedicine in a really good laboratory.” She was awarded a five-year Wellcome Fellowship for that and did her PhD in Sheffield on bone regeneration in a human osteoporosis lab. After post-doc research, lecturing and teaching, she became head of the basic science department and a professor at the Royal Veterinary College, before returning to Bristol to head up the vet school.

This wide and deep academic experience in both veterinary medicine and the broader scientific fields, now finds her as Vice-Chancellor of the Royal Agricultural University. However, Jo says she did not come from a learning culture, where leadership was explicitly thought about in the way it might be for high-flying young professionals today.

“My son is in the army, and it is great to see him being trained in leadership:

he is much more aware of his own leadership characteristics at a much younger age. But nobody talked to us about that: when I was a young person, nobody talked about what sort of leader you might be. We had to learn leadership when we went into leadership roles, just on the hoof.”

But even if people were not actively nurtured as they might be today, the qualities that can go to make up one aspect of leadership might be visible early on in life, Jo believes.

“I think often the characteristics of wanting to shape your environment and lead people can come through quite early. For me, leadership is about having a vision, and then communicating a strategy so that people can actually see the direction of travel that you're going in. You need resilience as well, and you have to take people with you. And the approach depends on whether

the situation demands keeping things steady, or bringing about change.”

In her last two roles, Jo explains, the emphasis has been on taking a new direction rather than continuity.

“At Bristol vet school we had a compelling vision of the direction we wanted to go, and a lot of that was about bringing in the best academic talent. We wanted to recruit a professor of veterinary education to revolutionise the new curriculum, and were able to leverage quite significant resource from the university, and paint a picture to the people we wanted, like Professor Sarah Baillie, to accomplish that. After all, any leader is only as good as the people they recruit.”

For Jo, leadership problems can arise when values are not aligned between the leadership team and staff, a situation that can be held in tension in the academic world when “the goals and values of academics may not always align with organisational purpose.” And she identifies that sometimes the people who make good leaders don't necessarily have to be organisationally-minded people who always follow the party line.

“I think some of my characteristics make being a leader harder for me in some contexts, because I was probably never good at taking instructions, even when I was little. I was always: ‘right, we're going to do this and this’. But you can't progress science if everybody saw the world through the same lens and you can't move forward if everyone accepts the status quo. I believe that academic leaders have a responsibility to encourage young people to think outside the box, to constructively challenge and have the self-belief that they can make a real difference.” ●

*Professor Joanna Price BSc BVSc PhD  
MRCVS, Vice-Chancellor, Royal  
Agricultural University*



**“I believe that academic leaders have a responsibility to encourage young people to think outside the box, to constructively challenge and have self-belief.”**

# Ross: this is the time for us vets to shape the future of our profession

**Ross Allan** of The Pets'n'Vets Family was in the right place at the right time as a young lad in Glasgow, and he believes that vets of today are in a better position than ever before to have control over their own destinies.

**F**or Ross, it all started with the most random chance encounter. As a boy scout doing bob-a-job week on the Southside of Glasgow, he knocked on an elderly woman's door and, when they got talking, she asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up.

"I said I wasn't really sure, and she said 'well would you want to be a vet?' I said that I thought maybe that would be interesting, and she said 'well you should meet my son then, he's a vet.' So I started out helping in the consulting room round the corner from where I was brought up, cleaning kennels, counting out tablets, wiping things down, making up vaccines. I was 13, but I was treated in a grown-up way: I liked it, having responsibility. And having £3 at the end of the night if I did the job well. And I must have learned something from the vets, Ivor Lough and George Leslie, because I'm still there now: I am a partner in the practice."

When Ross began working for George and Ivor as an assistant after

qualification, the partners had two practices. Since then, with George retiring and with the addition of a further partner, Oliver Jackson, they have grown to six in Glasgow and the surrounding area, supported by the Roundhouse Hospital. He believes they are steering a steady course through the new world of corporatisation.

"There has been a massive amount of change, no doubt, and this has accelerated over the last three to five years. We've got 87 staff now, we've got a hospital. We can do our investment in staff and training to create the structure and the environment we want, that we know people want to work in, and that our clients need. So we have a programme for newly qualified nurses, because we identified there was a significant jump from qualification to moving into the full rota and having increasing responsibility for more complex patient care. We have a receptionist academy.

"Our branch structure works for

individual vet development: meaning we can mentor someone in one practice, and then they'll go to one of the others and learn something different, come back to the hospital and have scope to start a certificate. It works for us because we can shape our business, and it works for our staff as well. We've got the size so we can really accommodate people with career breaks, and flexible working, things that can be a bit harder in a smaller business. But we are also small enough that we maintain our culture."

That culture is very grounded in Glasgow, what the city represents and what its residents need.

"Glasgow wears its heart on its sleeve, it's warm, welcoming, honest, up-front. Our partnership is called The Pets'n'Vets Family, and we are part of the community and part of the city, and we were very proud to be named Glasgow's Favourite Business in the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce Business Awards.

"But there is no doubt that charging



an appropriate price for the services we provide is a difficulty for vets. We are so fortunate to live in a country that has an NHS: you look at Queen Elizabeth University Hospital here in Glasgow, it's brand new with individual rooms and a helipad on the roof. You go there, you get treated, and you are not charged anything.

"And almost all vets, and I hold my hand up here for sure, have been guilty of compassionate charging to some degree. We've gone to university to be vets, not to want to charge clients money. But we tell our new vets about the necessities, about what we charge, about overheads. None of our vets are on a bonus, nobody has

**"Now is the time for the profession to take control of its own destiny, for each individual vet to play a key part in the future."**

targets, but we make clear that accurate estimates have to be done and the conversation needs to happen with clients before the treatment happens."

Ross still goes back to the school where he was educated to talk at careers evenings, and to let young people know that these are exciting times to be a vet.

"Now is the time for the profession to take control of its own destiny, for each individual vet to play a key part in the future. Everyone I work with cares passionately about the profession, and with the changing ownership of practices, it is vital that individuals feel the responsibility for and shape the commercial landscape we work in tomorrow. When I was 13, that's what George and Ivor gave me: the chance to have ownership and responsibility and that is a big thing at any age. The need for leadership is greater than ever before, but the opportunity is greater than it has ever been." ●

*Ross Allan, BVMS PGCertSAS MRCVS, Partner, The Pets'n'Vets Family*

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