

colleagues that a diverse veterinary team is a more resilient and necessary one. We must ensure we provide safe and welcoming environments for our future colleagues to step into.

Limiting people because they might experience challenges is an admission of defeat. We should be challenging the perceptions of those who discriminate, rather than telling the next generation they aren't 'the right fit'.

It's time we stop 'protecting' people out of their aspirations and continue efforts to make the sector worthy of their talent.

The role of people in positions of responsibility at our universities is to equip students with the skills to succeed in any sector they choose, not to decide which doors should remain closed to them.

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## PUBLIC HEALTH

### Assessing what types of dog attack take place

RESEARCHERS at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) are assessing the scale of the 'dangerous dogs' problem and investigating the nature of dog attacks. In addition to assessing existing data, we're seeking information on people's experiences of dog bites and dog attacks to inform approaches to preventing dog bites.

Previous research identified that the dog bite and dog attack problem is not confined to those dogs classed as dangerous by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.<sup>1</sup> Research shows that other dog breeds are still involved in attacks,

“**Discouraging any driven student from entering this field is a risk the UK agricultural industry cannot take**

while the law is largely reactive, mainly dealing with dogs that are dangerously out of control after an incident has taken place. While banned breeds that are kept under an exemption should be muzzled and on a lead in public, this may be difficult to enforce. This problem isn't overcome by adding the XL bully or other dogs to the list of banned breeds. Potentially, it adds to the enforcement issue if additional resources are not also being provided to help with enforcement.

Our knowledge of dog bites and dog attacks from previous research is limited by a lack of reliable data on the nature and prevalence of dog attacks. Our knowledge is largely based on the evidence of hospital data which provides a useful picture of those attending hospital because of a dog bite, but reveals little about the causes of dog bites or the circumstances in which they occur.<sup>2,3</sup>

Our data on the causes of dog bites are limited and prior research for Defra recommended better recording of information about dog attacks.<sup>4</sup> Collection of better data and in-depth understanding and analysis of how, why and where dog attacks take place will allow us to identify ways of preventing dog attacks.

Researchers at ARU are collecting evidence on the nature of dog bite incidents. We'll use this to develop an evidence base of the types of dog attack incidents that take place. We are specifically seeking the views of dog owners who have experienced dog control problems and others who have been involved in dog attack incidents.

We are using an online questionnaire to collect (anonymised) information. Vets and their clients

with experience of dog bites and dog attacks may be interested in providing information for the research.

We invite you to complete the questionnaire at <https://app.onlinesurveys.jisc.ac.uk/s/angliaruskin/safety-around-dogs> or to alert your clients to it.

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## BOVINE TB

### How badger culling became polarised

WITH Defra due to be updating its bovine TB (bTB) strategy soon,<sup>1</sup> it is worth considering how polarised views emphasised by the Godfray panel<sup>2</sup> might best be resolved.

One of the main controversies of recent years has been the usefulness of the badger cull. Division has run far deeper than any tired wildlife versus farming narrative, or unsubstantiated perspective on bias.

Scientific issues have had the most polarising influence. The Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBCT) in 2007 claimed that badger culling could play 'no meaningful role' in bTB control.<sup>3</sup> As badger culling preparations began in 2011, this view was maintained publicly, by both those who designed and ran the RBCT and Robert May, a previous government chief scientific adviser. An alternative view by the next



government chief scientific advisor, David King,<sup>4</sup> led to plans for badger culling.

Attitudes were further polarised as the first pilot culls took place from 2013, to test the humaneness of the shooting of free-roaming badgers at night with rifles. The government's Independent Expert Panel on Badger Culling Pilots found that, compared to cage-trap culling, 'free shooting' was significantly inferior in terms of pain levels and time to death,<sup>5</sup> with the BVA then opposing the method. Increasingly, the use of free shooting became a polarising issue, due to the endorsement of avoidable cruelty by chief veterinary officers.

More recently, polarisation has established due to some scientists publicly questioning the RBCT statistical analyses,<sup>6</sup> claiming newly discovered flaws do not support the conclusions, while others have restated, amplified or sought to defend the original analyses.<sup>7</sup> This includes Defra agencies, which still rely upon many estimations parametrised by RBCT calculations that have been called into question.<sup>8</sup> In 2025, Mark Brewer's call for a 'proper investigation be conducted to establish an agreed position involving all parties'<sup>9</sup> and collective dialogue is welcome.

Further, a better understanding of the sensitivity and specificity of the single intradermal comparative cervical tuberculin (SICCT) test in 2018<sup>10</sup> has sadly still not removed the unhelpful 'inconclusive reactor' label in England, which wrongly, in my view, attributed a 'hidden reservoir' to badgers, in line with stale RBCT thinking.

Importantly, polarisation continues to hamper the development of a coherent evidence base for an effective bTB control policy. It stems from a misplaced reluctance to openly address the sequence of poor historic advice going back 30 years and the uncertainty as to whether badger culling experimental outcomes are sound, as if it simply does not matter.<sup>2</sup>

The uncertain science of the RBCT and other government data merely nurtures polarisation. Future depolarisation requires open and honest cooperation from all those



involved, followed by a large-scale government public information initiative.

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**Polarisation continues to hamper the development of a coherent evidence base for an effective bTB control policy**

## PROFESSION

### RCVS' involvement with UKHACC

I WRITE following my previous letter and the response by the RCVS president, Tim Parkin, discussing the RCVS' participation in the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change (UKHACC) (VR, 17/24 January 2026, vol 198, pp 90–91).

I am grateful that Parkin explained that the RCVS, while not representative, has a role in the promotion of best practice, 'including in the area of environment and sustainability'. I have taken his advice and read the RCVS strategic plan 2025–2029. I have also revisited the UKHACC website and reread the section in which it advocates for plant-based diets. Interestingly, the RCVS logo is one of three highlighted in that document, and the RCVS is credited with a significant contribution to its production.

I concur with Parkin's assertion that the veterinary profession has much to offer and should be integral to the development of all things wrapped in the One Health concept. I do not see the links between veterinary best practice and the dietary strategies promoted by UKHACC, which I believe to be a lobby group relying on outdated and discredited evidence to support its case.

In my earlier letter, I suggested that the RCVS would do well to help our nations prepare for an incursion of the foot-and-mouth disease virus. Parkin chose to reference the increased risks from zoonoses associated with climate change, which rather misses the point that we need to be ready to respond, urgently, to an animal disease emergency which is considered to be a current high risk and is not mitigated by a long-term climate change plan.

I hope Parkin can further enlighten me on the processes by which the RCVS decided to join UKHACC. How, when contributing to UKHACC affairs, does the RCVS follow its principles of doing the right thing, and doing things right? What does it cost the RCVS to be a member of UKHACC? How does the RCVS resource and finance its contributions to the ongoing business and policy development of UKHACC?