



## **For the Record: Official Veterinarians and the impact of Brexit transcript**

Evangelos Katsoulis:

It's very frustrating when everything is fine, the products are ticked on the boxes, followed the legislature and everything, and then it just have something missing on the paperwork, and it gets redirected or something. Or at some point, every country seemed to have some different requirement, the blue pen, red pen, and this way or that way. And it comes down to bureaucratic stuff at the end of the day and it's really, really annoying sometimes.

Speaker 2:

Hello and welcome to For the Record, a new podcast series from RCVS Knowledge. In this episode, we hear from vets working as official veterinarians within the public health sector, some of whom trained in other European nations before moving to the UK.

The first part of this episode was recorded on the 14th of December 2020 before the confirmation of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, and all three participants are employed by Eville & Jones. The participants discuss their reasons for choosing to work in public health, the challenges they have encountered, and the relationships they have built. They also talked about what they expect would be the impact on the sector of the UK leaving the EU.

Andrei Ungureanu:

My name is Andrei Ungureanu. I'm veterinarian from 2013. I graduate veterinary medicine faculty at University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine in Bucharest. I'm working in UK from 2016, so three years after my graduation, I decided I wanted an international experience, and I wanted to start from somewhere. And I had the opportunity to move here in UK.

Juan Avila:

Good morning, everyone. My name is Juan Avila. I am a veterinarian. I graduated from the University of Cordoba in Spain. Long, long ago, I came to England with the intention of studying a Master of Science, and that's what I did in Reading University. I did a Master of Science in Food Technology because I always wanted to specialize myself in public health, and I've been working as an official veterinarian. And also, actually, I'm now one of the directors of Eville & Jones. And a part of carrying on working as an OV, I have a responsibility in running the company, and recruiting and supporting the official veterinarians.

Sara Basto:

Hello, everyone. My name is Sara Basto. I did my university in Portugal back in Villarreal. I came here in UK in 2018, so almost two, three years ago because I've always wanted to go somewhere to live abroad ever since I was really young. And UK was something that was you see in the movies comparing, well in my opinion, to Portugal.

I moved here because I have someone that was already working for Eville & Jones in my faculty back then, so I sent in my CV and three days after or something like this, they called me and they said, "Oh

you can come in two weeks." Okay fine, so early. And I was really excited to come here, and it has been great. Yeah.

Andrei Ungureanu:

My experience is a bit similar with moving in UK. I already knew someone working here, a friend of mine, a colleague of university, was already working for Eville & Jones.

Juan Avila:

Oh, clearly, it was different on my situation. I first came here to do my master in Reading University, and my intention was to come back to Spain and get a job there. I have to say that back in the '90s, there were very, very few vets who could speak decent English, Spanish vets I mean. I couldn't speak decent English, so I would have to have a Master of Science in a prestigious university like Reading.

But I was trying to find a job in this specialization of public health. I couldn't get any in Spain. I found one opportunity to work as an official veterinarian in the Lancaster region. I remember that interview. It took me one minute, that was it. And they asked me if I was a vet, if I knew about public health. I say, "Yeah, yeah." "What are you doing at the moment?" "I'm doing a Master of Science in Food Technology." "No, interesting. When are you finishing?" "I'm finishing September." "Okay, you can start working the day after."

And that's how I started to work as an official veterinarian. It's true that I wanted to have that job in Spain but as I couldn't get it, I was more than happy to have it here.

Sara Basto:

When I was back in the university, I was more inclined to do it's exotic animals, and I ended up doing my thesis in aquaculture, so it was quite a change. And I stayed for two years and a half working in research in aquaculture before I actually started to have an interest in public health. I did some online food safety, like post grad, and it opened my mind to this kind of area. And what about you, Andrei? Did you only think of public health?

Andrei Ungureanu:

I listened to your story. It's amazing. It's a bit quite similar with mine. I mean, I've took in consideration all the time about the food safety even though in Romania in the last two years in university you are choosing where you are doing the master in the same time with the other subject of the faculty, and I chose the master for large animals. The main reason, honestly, I wanted to not have too much contact with pets owners. And the farmers are different. My family, my father is a farmer, so I was more inclined to do this.

I started to work in food safety first time a few months, after I was finishing the university, in [inaudible 00:06:28] Romania. I was working as a quality assistant, so that was my first job in food safety. I can't say it was easy, I can't say it was hard. I mean, there were night shifts and a rota for them. After one year, I passed to another job, I got another job as a quality manager in a superstore. So it was a great job, honestly a great, great job.

And then, I moved to the UK. I've worked as MHI because the pathologies were a little bit far away from me there, already three years away from my memory. So I started to remember everything I've learned with four years ago actually. I've worked three months and after that I've moved for the OV, which remember me so much about the university. They brought me back in time. And I've worked as MHI, generally in small slaughterhouses, small family businesses, for the last three years.

Around March, I took a new position as area resource manager, so I'm managing the resources that will have to be deployed for meat hygiene inspectors. It's a new challenge. I like what I'm doing. I discover in the meantime that I like to work with people, actually. I like the food industry because it's ensuring everyone and sometimes I feel that the society is not fully aware about the role that we are having inside of the slaughterhouse.

Juan Avila:

Yeah, I do agree with you, Andrei. I think the good thing about working in public health as a veterinarian is the combination of working with people and working with animals in some respect and using your knowledge as a veterinarian and also using your social skills because, as you say, they're completely different than the pet owners, than the people that you're dealing with.

That's what I like as well. I like working with people, things that give you more satisfaction for the job of being able to support and help those people, all of them coming from abroad and trying to settle down in a different country with different customs, tradition, and everything. And those people need this kind of support and help. And I like being having a bit more experience. I've been living here for much longer than most of the people in the company. I'm happy to help and transmit this experience.

We have, as you say, until you start to work as a meat hygiene inspector where you can concentrate more in optimal pathologies and you see more situations and you can obviously refresh your memory from when you were a student at the university. And then, you move into official veterinarian where you develop more your skills in animal welfare. You need to do a very good importing and exporting inspections. You have to be aware of the auto-control systems of the plant. And again, you need to deal with the owner of the plant to make sure that he comply with the regulations.

And then, we have the new specialization that definitely is going to get much, much bigger, that is the exports side. The export is also so something really interesting having to certify those products, and then you're sending abroad. So, you have this variation of different specialization side at public health. At the same time, you might have a management role.

Andrei Ungureanu:

What I will say and like here in UK, comparing with Romania, the importance of the welfare for the public because I mean the laws are based on what the public opinion is requesting from the government. So when I saw how important is here the welfare for animals and even if a single bird is having a wing trapped between the trees and you have still to refer it for further investigation, I was amazed.

UK is having the regulation much upper than the European Union in this matter because the European Union had to standardize for the level of all countries. So you'll have that eastern world is very important, the hygiene, and not so much the welfare of the animals. And then, you'll have the western, where the welfare is more important than hygiene 100%. And as a vet, that was amazing for me. You can't do this job without loving animals.

I wanted to start to discuss about export as well about... yeah. It is not a new thing, but the demand for export, I think, for the veterinary profession will be good. Even though I'm not sharing the same opinion for the country as a whole. I mean, probably we'll have a food little bit more expensive on the plate. But for us, as job for veterinarians, definitely it might be an option. I know friends which are a bit burned out after working in clinic a while, very good vets, but still they said, "I want to do something else for a period."

Sara Basto:

I see you, Andrei. I also started as an MHI having to remember everything from back at university and I worked for, I think, it was around five months. And then, I moved on to be an OV. When I started as OV, then I worked in several different places. Like you and Juan, I loved working with people, but I have to say sometimes it's a struggle because obviously, we're there to do enforcement, and the FBO is not really completely happy about it.

So, I mean, you have your team to rely on and you work as a team with your fellow E&J colleagues and the FSA. If you work well as a team, you have that support in the plant, which is everything because without that, it's just you struggling against the FBO, and it makes your life a lot harder.

I started doing exports more often, so I'm mainly doing exports now, and it's a whole different world. And now, with Brexit, we have these chefs visits that I'll be doing as well. And so everything is changing, and we have to adapt, and we are very good at that because we are so flexible in our jobs that it makes it easier. And how was it back in the days, Juan?

Juan Avila:

In some way, it was similar from the very beginning. What you have to bear in mind that the big change for the public health sectors, so here for the veterinarians came in 1993 when the single market started. It's funny that we're talking about 1993 when the single market started, and in less than three weeks is when I aimed I'm finished. It's sad at the same time.

But anyway, the difference was back in those days I did my course in 1993, and I was the only foreigner at that time. They were all British. So basically, when I started to work, most of the slaughterhouses didn't have a veterinarian in place. They only have meat inspectors because before '93, obviously, we were doing export because any products that was going across to Europe needed an export certificate, so vets were only required to do export certificates in the slaughterhouses in England, with exception in Scotland. In Scotland, every single slaughterhouse had a veterinarian.

So basically, it was different, and it was different in the way that the food business operators, FBO. They were not used to have a vet. They didn't understand why I have to be there. They were saying this is Europe imposing it, and they were not happy. So it was a bit difficult at that time, and we needed to demonstrate to them. And then, we were leading that, we were there to help with support to make sure products are safe for the public health and everything. So obviously with the time, things are changing.

Sara Basto:

I'm talking about the past, but I guess we all want to know what we feel like how is it going to change because of Brexit. So Juan, do you have...?

Juan Avila:

I don't know. Where should I start? I'm very worried about Brexit because in the sector of public health, we could potentially come back to pre '90s situation where veterinarians were not required in the slaughterhouse, and they only had the supervision of a meat inspector, and they're very important. The meat inspectors are all official [inaudible 00:15:56] in Europe.

And their role and function extremely important, but they cannot do the same job as an official veterinarian. They don't have the same training. They don't have the same knowledge. So I'm very worried that they could say, "Okay. Those plants, they're now going to do export. Medium and small plants just for domestic market." They could say that they don't need a veterinarian, so this is my worrying about the Brexit. What is your feeling on, Andrei?

Andrei Ungureanu:

Oh, exactly like you said, I mean for the moment, those which are working food industry, especially in the slaughterhouses, most of them are immigrants. However, there are still a lot of British vets which are working in for Animal and Plant Health Agency. So, I've met few British student veterinarians which are interested for the job in the slaughterhouse.

I will mention that the culture for veterinarians here in UK was more specific for clinic. It wasn't like we were taught that it's having this side as well and you are protecting actually the whole population, protecting the outbreaks, or anyway if you're looking on numbers, how much it causes a society of food which is not fit enough for it to be eaten. It's quite big, so I'm afraid of what you are saying that for the small businesses, the veterinarians will not be used anymore.

And if you are looking on the numbers that FSA is reporting, that we are reporting, to FSA and APHA about welfare cases for example, breaches of welfare regulations, which every month on the level of the country it's quite high. So I'm thinking if a vet will not be there, that person might be much more inclined to say, "You know what, maybe welfare is not so important." I'm optimistic and pessimistic at the same time. I'm seeing multiple scenarios' but it's uncertainty which is still in the air.

Sara Basto:

I quite agree with you both. I think that most places require a vet anyway to do exports. So, why are we going to have two different levels of standards in the slaughterhouses? Is that how it is going to work? So, British people will eat meat that is not by vets, but then we export, well, "better" meats that is going out... I mean, in the end, it doesn't make sense. I think... I really don't know. I guess we'll say it is not long until...

Andrei Ungureanu:

You pointed it well. I mean, if I would be a British citizen and thinking that what is exported from my country is having a better standard than what I'm having in the butchery, I wouldn't be happy. However, I think this is something that, I don't know, I'm having colleagues which are working for Food Standards Agency in Scotland. And the culture is a bit different and the approach to FBO between the authorities, between the FSS and the FSA.

In my opinion, it's just that sometimes, at the end of the day, it shouldn't be just a business. The customer should be the principal beneficiary, not just to draw a line and let's see if it's profitable or not. It should be, is it safe enough? Is it enough safe for our public? Not if it's just, I mean, okay the money as in everything are having their role. But this is a service which even though if it'll not be profitable enough should be held by the government just to make sure that the things are in order.

Juan Avila:

Yeah. Another aspect of the Brexit is how it's going to influence our colleagues when needed to go and work here. At the moment, it's extremely easy. You are recognized by the RCVS, you just need to jump in a plane.

Now, after Brexit, you cannot just jump in a plane and come here. You need a visa And a visa is going to be the same if you're coming from Portugal, Spain, Romania. And if you come from, I don't know, from Mexico or the States or if you come from any other country, so Europeans we're not going to have any advantage towards the other nationalities.

And to get a visa is expensive for a long process, and they are much more requirements. So that's going to be 10 times more difficult for one of our colleagues for you to come and maybe they might not feel

that attracted now. Obviously, we're watching the news in our own countries about Brexit, and for instance in Spain, the perception is no good. The perception is the British are very selfish, and they want to get back their own empire, and they don't want to do anything with Europe. And I defend that when I go to Spain, I said, "Not really. I mean, most of the people are extremely open for those things. I don't have that view."

But unfortunately, that is what it is among the young people. They might feel like, "I don't want to go to UK, not to work." They don't want to do anything, they don't want to be connected to Europe. I don't really like that because that is going to be a very bad aspect for the veterinarian in general here. So if they're going to make it more complicated for young vets to come here, we are going to be struggling to get enough vets for anything. I'm not just talking about the sector of public health, I'm talking about the small animals and any other sectors.

It's clear that they don't provide enough veterinarians in this country. I know that they have opened a new vet school, and I think that's extremely important, and it's good news. But still, it would be a long way before we can supply enough vets in this country for the massive demands that we have now. Having Brexit and having these difficulties is going to be a big, big struggle for the profession. How do you see that, Sarah? How do you see the impact of the Brexit?

Sara Basto:

I have to say I think we'll have to wait and see. They want what's best for the country, and I don't think that would be Brexit, but it's happening. So I hope in the end, that come to a point where everything will just be okay again. I see many people already leaving the country. Many Portuguese, I have groups on Facebook, many of them have decided to leave because of the uncertainty of how everything is going to be.

In the beginning, it will be chaotic. It's like the exports, everything will be chaotic, and we'll have a lot of work, and we'll work a lot of hours in our sector just to make sure that public health will still be a priority and to make sure all the food is safe and to do all these exports. If there's no deal and we have to start doing them for every country in Europe, which will be a lot.

Juan Avila:

Now, it will be impossible to cover all the exports. What is annoying is that we were supposed to know yesterday if there was deal or no deal. Thanks God, it was no deal, so that's the only positive thing. But at the same time, they are just postponing to... I don't know, I suppose to the last minute. And there will be no time for preparation, and that's ridiculous, and then we'll get to that point. But yes, if they manage to get a deal and not deal is a benefit for everyone, that will be great. And obviously, we want the best for Great Britain because we live here and-

Sara Basto:

What kept me here... Oh, well, this year is just three years really, but what I've been keeping me here is knowing that I'm making a difference. I'm making a difference in that animal's life today. I'm making sure that all the animals I see are treated with respect and their welfare is guaranteed. I'm making sure that all the food is in a safe manner than in the slaughterhouse, and there are no risks for human consumption.

It's a very important job that we don't actually acknowledge, our people actually don't acknowledge, because it just comes into light when we have food poisoning that affected how many people. So, this came from somewhere, from either handling the carcasses like they shouldn't. It doesn't have to be from the slaughterhouse really. We have the transports. We have a lot of parts that are part of the

public health. We're just there to make sure that everything that is done in our supervision is done in the best way possible because obviously we don't want people to get sick from the food they eat.

So it's a very important job. It's very rewarding in that aspect, and I have to say welfare being for me is the most difficult part because I suffer with the animals. I mean, I'm not one of those people that goes there and looks at the animals and is impartial. I go there and sometimes I touch them, and I feel them. And it is like my way of saying, "Okay, you are here with a purpose but everything was okay. You're okay. You were loved." If I can say this way, and I just want them to have the best slaughter possible, humane, and that's what I am for every day.

With export, it's exactly the same. We are there to make sure that they actually export what they are saying, and everything is okay. And we are the testing that that food is safe for other country to consume it. It's a very important job in the end. And when you're in clinic, I guess you have to struggle sometimes with difficult clients, and every day is different so it's a different world. Maybe sometimes you work long hours but if you do you work just four days, and this is so important. We are not on-call. We don't do nights. So I think it's a good option for people to think about it.

Juan Avila:

Just to say then, especially nowadays that we have a new concept called One Health. And this concept is really, really important. For once, they are bringing together the animal health and the human health and the environment into this One Health concept, and I think that is a very attractive point. It's basically you can feel that working as a veterinarian in public health has got a lot of contributions that is associated to the public and to everyone. I don't think normal people from the streets knows that there are vets working in public health. What does it mean a vet working in public health? Sometimes I explain and I work in slaughterhouse, they said, "Do you save the animals that are going for slaughter?" I say, "No, that's not... The function of the veterinarian is just making sure that the animal welfare standard is to the top and those animals are treated humanely." And you're making sure that the end product is fit for human consumption, so it's a very important job with a lot of responsibility.

I think this is, for me, the most important part of vet for public health is the responsibility and the contributions you have to a society. That's the way I will summarize it.

Andrei Ungureanu:

Maybe, I'm thinking, with the times, the British vets will see in this future career. Exactly like my colleague Sarah was saying, this is just the beginning in food safety and with what Juan was saying with One Health, everything is interconnected. It might be a good option for the British vets as well. So I think in time, this culture for vets in food safety can be built here as well.

Speaker 2:

The second part of this episode was recorded on the 1st of September 2022, 15 months after the Trade Agreement came into effect. All three of these participants work as official veterinarians for Food Standards Scotland.

Evangelos Katsoulis:

My name is Evangelos Katsoulis. Please call me Evan. Well, I come from Greece. I graduated from Greece, University of Thessaly, and I came to the UK in Scotland particularly in 2015 for some post-graduate studies, initially University of Glasgow. And then, I started working as an OV in 2016 starting from the south area, around Glasgow, and northern, down to the borders. And then, moving to Central Belt, I'm in Dundee now, covering that area as well.

And for the past three years, I was the supervisory OV as well. I was involved also in audits and approvals for either newly built or already established businesses. But now, I'm back working in abattoir, specifically game handling establishment, so mostly working with wild game now.

Arabella White:

Great. And I'm Arabella White. I graduated from Liverpool University in 2020, and I'm originally from the UK. And my first job was with Food Standards Scotland, so I moved up to Scotland from where I'm from in West Sussex in 2021, just at the beginning of the year for the new role that were being set up for certifying fishery products, so certification.

Obviously, exit of the UK from the EU meant that certification would be needed and Food Standards Scotland had opened and set up three fishery export hubs. So I moved up for that role, certification officer. And then, after about 10 months, I moved into the role of interim operations manager. And more recently, I've moved to area one, so managing the vets in the abattoirs in area one, which is the northern part of Scotland.

Jose Rodriguez:

I'm Jose Rodriguez, and I graduated in 2000 in Spain in the University of Leon. So what happened is that in a time, in-between work, I become unemployed. I said, "I'm going to come to Scotland," and it has been 17 years since then. The Scottish people might have done with me something good. I have to say that I first come to work in UK in 2002, first as an inspector, then as an OV. I returned to Spain. I spent three years working as a food safety advisor for the poultry industry. And finally, for Food Standards Scotland all this time working as official veterinarian.

Well, so far, I have been involved in different activities, official controls. I have been involved in audit. Currently, I'm involved in animal welfare assessment participation and, as I have said, official control.

Arabella White:

I was just going to ask Jose, particularly been here a long time, have you seen any change in the landscape of OV work since you've arrived? Also Evan, yourself also, have you noticed any change in the type of vet that is doing the work or where the vets are from? That kind of thing.

Jose Rodriguez:

But yes, there has been a lot of changes, a lot of difference. The way in which we have it involved on the official controls, the way in which the official controls are deliver. I remember back in the year 2002, where we have to send a bunch of papers to York, to headquarters, now everything is electronic. And in relation with all the vets come from, I have to say that probably there's a different in the profile because on my first year that, at least in my perception, it used to be a destination of new graduates to come here to work for a few years, get experience, get [inaudible 00:34:10], and then come back.

Right now, due to the difficulties of the Brexit, I think that if you want to work in UK, in Scotland, you need to be convinced... If you got here, it cannot be for a few months, lets put it like that. I'm happy to say that more and more Scottish vet, more British vets are coming to join us because probably previously it was not perceived a work that a vet could do. And I'm happy to say that right now, we do not own the veterinary schools. There's more awareness about the importance of the veterinary role or the veterinary profession on public health.

Evangelos Katsoulis:



Yeah, so from my side, obviously, Jose has been here longer than me. Actually, he was one of the people that inducted me in his abattoir and helped me through my journey as an OV, so the changes I've seen are very small compared to what he just described.

But the biggest one is that it used to be that Hallmark was the contractor that was bringing in vets to work on behalf of FSS. Whereas now, we are directly employed by FSS and obviously, this makes the job a lot more attractive, at least from my point of view, than what it used to be. It's a government job so it's way more secure, and I think it leads to maybe improve how people view this part of the veterinary profession.

Maybe not only the veterinary students but the public as well. I don't know how the curriculum in the British university is, in the veterinary universities. Back home, it's a bit different because it doesn't only focus on meat, it goes over to dairy products as well, milk, fish, and seafood. It was interesting when I came here, and I wanted to work in public health anyway but it was weird at first. It was only meat and nothing else.

Arabella White:

Yeah, I think it's interesting just touching on how the veterinary public health is taught really. You're talking about your experience in Greece. And obviously, graduating in 2020 from Liverpool University, I think across the board in UK universities, I don't think they're too dissimilar in the fact that the public health part is quite narrow and quite limited, I would say, and it is heavily on the clinical side.

I think obviously, there is a lot to learn on the clinical side of the public health. But I think from my kind of experience and friends is that it's not given as much importance as it should do. I think majority of students tend to dismiss it slightly.

Evangelos Katsoulis:

Even though it was the same for us, I mean, I'm the only one from my year, that I know of at least, that went into public health. Everyone else works with either pets or farm animals.

But until a few years ago, I was the only Greek vet in FSS because even me, when I started the first year, I had no idea about that part of the veterinary profession. I didn't realize it. I never understood any. I knew that there were being official controls and text data inspections from the food before it's released to the public, but I had no grasp of who does it and all the details, how the sources is made, as they say.

Jose Rodriguez:

I could say something about the importance of our profession, guys. How important it is. If you think how many people could eat the meat that I have produced, that my abattoir have produced today, probably thousands. And if you think that if we miss something, we are like the goalkeeper. People eventually could die.

And if you think that we have a unique opportunity on the animal health point of view, I'm always trying to put through to prove how important is how our profession and how important is our role because I believe that we are the best treated professionals because we have the knowledge of pathology and how these pathologies could impact on the human beings and that is what make us ideal to cover the public health.

Arabella White:

Yes, I definitely agree it's really important, and I think it's from my knowledge or background, it's just frustrating, I find at times that it isn't talked about more or in the wider veterinary world, it isn't

necessarily seen as a great part as it should be. And I think within vet schools, within students, I think it personally does go right back to students. Obviously, the image of a vet normally is one out there, clinically helping animals. And I think obviously, you go to vet school with that in mind and that seems to be what your fixation is and you don't really want to deviate from that. But ultimately, I think it is about educating not just the veterinary community but everyone in the work of vets. When I speak to people and tell them what I do, I get quite into it, and I'm really, really explaining all about it. The first question I get is, "What practice do you work in?" And I'm like, "Well, no, I don't work in a practice. This is what I do." And they're like, "Oh I had no idea that vets were doing that work." And I'm like, "I know. No one knows."

So I think it's just really good to chat to people, and I'd love that to be a fly-on-the wall documentary, or we get all these clinical vet programs, but I'd love there to be another one of the other veterinary work. As Jose said, that is so important and that vets do it day in day out, and it's a vital job. There's just so much that you cover. We're in certification. Obviously, that's a whole new realm really for most vets since the explosion of Brexit, and there's a lot that I think, as vets, you might be expected to do with certification, but we weren't really taught about it at vet school. It was follow the 10 principles when you get your authorization from the Royal College and that's it.

Really, you're left to figure it out from yourself. But I think within so many variety of certificates there are out there, vets are doing that important work and taking it on because of their professional qualification. But again, it's something that is so vital and really up and coming, I think, in the veterinary world and that also needs support and talked about.

Evangelos Katsoulis:

Yeah, it has become more and more prominent in most abattoirs. Not all of them do exports straight from their premises, but it is completely different than what it was before Brexit. Now, it's all the time that those particular days there have support officers that come in to help the OV complete the text, and the paperwork has become quite busy.

And yeah, apart from the online course from Improve International, we do to get the APHA stamp and everything else. After that is just you're left on your own to figure out stuff. And it's very frustrating when everything is fine, the products are ticked on the boxes, followed the legislature and everything, and then it just have something missing on the paperwork, and it gets redirected or something. Or at some point, every country seemed to have some different requirement, the blue pen, red pen, and this way or that way. And it comes down to bureaucratic stuff at the end of the day. And it's really, really annoying sometimes.

Arabella White:

Yeah, I completely agree and I feel as the vet, obviously, you are the last person responsible for doing that certificate that a lot of work has gone on in the background, getting the export together, the logistics company, and then it's all on you. And I think there's a lot of pressure on vets to certify products.

Ultimately, you can't if you don't have everything that you need, but I think exports are a big business. And that's something that now vets are really at the forefront of, and you are the last link in the chain and them leaving without export health certificate it's not going to happen in lots of cases. And I think training for vets on that is a new thing really. And as Evan said, reading all that legislation, interpretation of legislation, definitely, is something that I covered at vet school.

Evangelos Katsoulis:

How was the situation in the fish hubs, Arabella?

Arabella White:

Yeah, so fish hubs is three of them in the Central Belt of Scotland, and all the fish comes down from all over Scotland Highlands and Islands, Orkney, Shetland, and then in the hubs, that's where the FSS vets are based to actually complete those export health certificates, on behalf of the exporter that's obviously exporting it to the EU, mainly to France.

And in the beginning, yes, we had quite a few challenges like you touched on, mentioning the different BCPs, even within the same country, having different ideas about what they wanted to see on those certificates. And it is very frustrating as a vet because you are doing that certificate to the best of your knowledge, you are completing it accurately, and you're following all the instructions, and you've got every confidence in it. But ultimately, if you just miss one box, if you just didn't certify one simple line, and you're doing it in a foreign language as well because at the moment, they're all physical copies and doing the language of the BCP that it's going to.

And it's very frustrating when you're doing a lot of work, you're doing quite a few export health certificates that we process in the hubs and for one small missed deletion, it's rejected. And it's an awkward conversation because, ultimately as a vet, you have to admit that, yes, you didn't maybe delete that one small box or that line, and it is down to your work ultimately. But it's so frustrating when it's something so small and at times, we really wish that there could be a little bit more tolerance really. Completely agree if it's completely wrong, and there's lots of errors on the certificate, but for very small minor things, I think that's where the frustration comes in.

But I think we have seen a positive progression, I think, in the hubs, I would say. Obviously, we've been running for a year and nine months now, which is as it seems to have flown by, but I think maybe we've got more confident with it. I think in the beginning it was all new. Everyone was getting used to certificates, used to stamping and certifying, and making sure you did it in the correct way.

Whereas now, I think the team have been doing it for so long that it's become a bit more second nature. But it's an interesting one, and I think obviously hearing discussions that are ongoing with DEFRA and APHA, there are still issues with certain BCPs and exports. And frustrations are still happening because people are getting mixed messages as well, so it's an ongoing struggle really, diplomacy in politics, but vets are now in the mix of, I would say.

Evangelos Katsoulis:

How about you, Jose? do you have any situations down there?

Jose Rodriguez:

Quite a few. For instance, China-European country complaining because we were using blue pens instead of red pens, difference between... Well, very important for certification. I'm being ironic, by the way. And I fully agree with Arabella on saying that at the end of the day you could have read, understood upside down the instructions, but if there's an specific instruction from a BCP, you better comply because even if you are right and you know that you are right, you may need to report this to the commission. Application could take weeks or even months to come out. So, "Okay, you want a red pen?" [inaudible 00:46:31]. Sometimes you could see that some of the points they are not that much related to Food Safety Standard, which is a bottom line but to politics.

Arabella White:

Obviously, we are all vets, but we're all civil servants and we're all working for the government really and that's definitely what attracted me to the role. I'd recognized that working with civil service, there are lots of opportunities, and there are lots of connections you can make and you're a vet. I definitely feel like I'm a vet first and foremost, but I recognize that your veterinary qualification is fantastic, and there's so many things that you can do with it.

There are certainly skills you have and you can apply that to so many different roles, so many different challenges, because we're quite unique individuals, I think, in our training and in how we approach everything. And yeah, working as a government vet, which I definitely tell people I am, just exposes you to how things work behind the scenes and all the legislation that goes on and why things are done, what's important, what we have to follow, why we do things, and understanding the wider context of the work that we do.

I think as vets, again, it's a funny thing that you're so animal focused but you very quickly learned that all animals have people around them, and I love being part of a team, working alongside people to resolve issues to get things done or with an animal welfare kind of undertone, which is why I wanted to be a vet in the first place, and I still hold true to this day that we're all working for that goal, we all care about that.

Jose Rodriguez:

About the animal welfare, I don't know if you guys have seen the film of The Last of the Mohicans?

Evangelos Katsoulis:

Yeah.

Jose Rodriguez:

At the beginning, they are chasing a deer. They shoot the deer, they killed the deer, and they prayed to the spirit of the deer for the gift, that animal has give to their people. Because of the meat, they could eat and they would not starve. My feeling for that is quite strong. We need to protect the animals at that stage and if we don't do it, no one else is going to do it. I'm still a vet, and I'm still protecting animals and this is probably one of the most important parts of my job. The animal welfare.

Evangelos Katsoulis:

Yeah. I'm going to have to agree with both of you. Basically, feeling of achievement after you helped the food business operator and the business improve in food safety and food hygiene aspects of their production, you basically see the results of obviously your work as well. Sometimes I know we have to go to the other extreme and go to enforcement and increase enforcement if need be.

All the OVs now, it's not always easy to help achieve compliance. But if you do it and then go down the line, they're a year or more and you see that they continue to do good, and everything is as it should be, and they're successful and they keep their place there, then it's really satisfying. When I started, I really think I would be in this position, working in this sector, but I really enjoy it.

Obviously, me and you, Jose, will deal with food business operators directly, but you, Arabella, are outside or obviously supervising and observing everything, so how different is it from OV's point of view?

Arabella White:

I think there's a few, well, different challenges, but same skills that you're using. How I would describe it? There's a lot to think about. You get pulled in lots of different directions, but I can appreciate that that probably is the same foot for you working. There's always someone needing your time, and you're always stretched for time. There's a lot of prioritization that goes on, a few more meetings I guess to attend, and keeping an oversight of everything, which as a vet you're used to juggling other cases, clinical cases, or your day-to-day work you.

I think you have that skill or you need that skill, don't you, to survive in some ways. So for me, I really like it because I'm a vet, and I still get to work with vets really closely in the field but also tapped into other things that might be going on and working well, working efficiently, all kind of challenges that I think a vet can bring to any role.

Jose Rodriguez:

I really sympathize with you, guys. We're trying to do reinforcement and then the industry say, "No." And then, we need to find the right points in the middle.

Arabella White:

Yeah, I think diplomacy is... I think, for everyone, diplomacy is a skill, isn't it? Breaking bad news or having to find a way to work together that might not be the easiest. It's definitely the skills that you have to sharpen up, I think, quite quickly. But ones they are rewarding, like you were both saying, if you get improvements, if you can find a way to work in tricky situations and you get a positive result, I think that really is such a rewarding experience.

Jose Rodriguez:

What we want to do is get the most positive outcome and diplomacy. I fully agree with it. We should go to the school of diplomacy after the vet school.

Arabella White:

Yes. Yeah, I definitely think so. And yeah, thinking of vet school, they try and teach you some, I think communication skills or what it was called, but there's nothing like actually being in the real world and getting thrown out there to practice them.

But another one that you know can add to your portfolio in a way, you take your science and knowledge from your degree, the bulk of it anyway. But then, you can gain so many further skills every day in the actual work that you're doing. Forever learning, I think, is definitely a theme of the profession, isn't it? You're always doing continual professional development, and I think you're always doing that in any veterinary job you undertake.

Jose Rodriguez:

I think that these social skills are so important because even if... I mean, in any work, any field of the veterinary profession, you need to work with your customers. If you work in a practice, you need to convince the one bringing dogs or the farmer or food business operator, "Hey, this is the first thing to do." Communications skills, conflict resolution. We can add key part of our profession.

Evangelos Katsoulis:

Yeah, I think that's the main thing I've heard from vet graduates that this is the part that they were not prepared for. I'm not specifically speaking about public health, but even in practice as you mentioned,

you're not prepared to come face to face with all the different clients and all the different owners and patients.

Arabella White:

How have you both found that the veterinary public health has changed in the last couple of years? Do you think you would've made the move to the UK since obviously the UK's left the EU? How is it viewed now?

Jose Rodriguez:

I'm thinking that talking with my best friends in Spain, the perception is that probably it's more difficult, which is true. And quite likely, we are European but we are not welcome. But what I keep saying is that, "Okay, despite the requirements would be harder, I could not say a bad word about how veterinary profession is supporting the new vets coming from the European Union."

Obviously, the veterinary profession in Great Britain, it needs to protect their self and make sure that the standard of the profession are kept. No matter where you come from, if you come from Spain, Greece, or Aberdeen, standard need to be the same.

And then, at the beginning of the Brexit, there was a lower limit on their salary. Then, it was clear that in some cases, for instance when we were working for private contractor, the salary was below that limit. And then, the salary has to raise because if we were wanting to work in UK, you want to work in UK coming from European Union, you need to have a minimum error, so probably these are the difficulties to come to [inaudible 00:54:58].

Other than that, on the positive side, what I would say that probably working in UK here in general, you're used to the conditions of all the workers, which is important because we all want to have a life balance.

Evangelos Katsoulis:

It's more or less the same as Jose described. I mean, some things apply exactly the same degrees as well as in Spain. I would presume work-life balances if the first thing they hear from friends as well. Start and then you finish, you don't know some days keep going on and on, but I'm not sure what my decision would be if I decided now to move here.

When I came here was for studies initially, I never had a thought of staying longer than that, but it just came to mind, "Let's try it. See if it takes..." Any date actually, I really enjoyed living in Scotland even if the weather is like this. I only have positive things to say. People are the most and the best part really, and that's what made me stay. But also, yeah, working conditions especially now, work-life balance, the salary, absolutely. And as I said, it's a government position so it's a secure job, and that they're in profession. There's a huge request for vets, especially now.

Now, a lot of my colleagues and some of my friends have relocated to the UK before Brexit, and they will remain here. None of them has left. I don't know if any others that will try and relocate now. But obviously, with the request for vets as it is, I wouldn't think it would be that difficult. I'm pretty sure businesses are or practices or whoever else is willing to help with a visa and everything else like that.

So for vet specifically, I don't see... I mean, yeah, it won't be as easy as jumping into the plane and landing here and that's it, but I would say it would be more or less the same. However, the same for me, I mean, I stayed without much of a thought, so I think if I did the same I would probably land here again if I stayed and think about it.

Jose Rodriguez:

On my last two years in Spain, I spent a lot of time traveling between my hometown and Madrid, the capital and the center. And on my first week in Glasgow when I arrived, I was thinking, "Gosh, it's the first time in two years that I'm fully unpacking," because my life before, and I think that is quite common, on new graduates down in European Unions, "Okay, you are commuting between one place and another." The big point to come to work in UK is that you could start a life, which is a very important thing. Just make roots that set in some place and just start to live, not only work.

Arabella White:

I think it's tricky in the world of public health, a lot of the things we've touched on because it's not the desired route when people think of being a vet, and it's not the first thing that comes to mind. And during the course, it's very hard, I think, for people to think differently.

In my experience, people come to it from the UK anyway a bit later when they've actually realized what the job entails or what they could get out of it, and maybe they've thought actually clinical doesn't exactly fit with what I thought it would be. As well, I think it's difficult. Obviously, you decide to be a vet normally when you're quite young to get on the hunt of exam and qualification, bandwagon of passing things, and getting to universities.

So, I think for me for the future, it's about educating people a bit more about what the job entails and what your veterinary degree gives you. I really think that needs emphasizing. Obviously, being a vet is a vocation, and the veterinary degree is very focused on the clinical side. But really talking about the veterinary degree in a bit more of a broader sense, everyone would benefit from that. Or not diminishing the clinical side at all, but just really talking about it as a great science degree that has so many possibilities.

Jose Rodriguez:

Something else that I think that is going to be a game changer on the professional care in Scotland could be when the Scottish Veterinary Service is going to be implemented because that is going to involve that we could potentially get involved in all the fields of the profession. And that's to give you a test for the Standard of Scotland OVs, we have been trained to assist APHA on their flu outbreak.

So now, potentially, we could go and check in farms to assist APHA flu report, which I think, as Arabella was saying, the veterinary profession is so broad that we need to be ready to jump to every field if needed. And I think that one of the lessons of Brexit and even the COVID outbreak is that if things happen, we are going to adapt very fast. And I think that we have proved that we are very good adapting fast to changes.

RCVS Knowledge: Thank you for listening to For the Record, join us next time for more insights from underrepresented voices within the veterinary professions. If you would like to get involved in future episodes, please contact the RCVS Knowledge Archives team by email at [archives@rcvsknowledge.org](mailto:archives@rcvsknowledge.org).

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). Feel free to adapt and share this document with acknowledgment to RCVS Knowledge. This information is provided for use for educational purposes. We do not warrant that information we provide will meet animal health or medical requirements.