



Veterinary colleagues joined Malcolm Cobb for a tour of the developing facilities at Nottingham. From left to right: Jim Scudamore (Liverpool), Malcolm Cobb (Nottingham), Sava Buncic (Serbia), Jane Downes (MHS), Kenneth Clarke (FSA), Alys Bradley (Assoc. of Toxicological Pathologists) and Mike Clarke (Minster Veterinary Group)

Government Veterinary Surgeons and representatives from the other UK and EU veterinary schools, industry and practice joined Malcolm Cobb and colleagues at Nottingham Veterinary School in May for a landmark meeting on undergraduate teaching in Veterinary Public Health in the UK.

Nottingham's 'blank piece of paper' approach to developing a course in veterinary public health, and the work by other veterinary schools to review delivery of veterinary public health teaching, provided a timely opportunity to discuss the full scope and relevance of delivering this important area of veterinary study.

Malcolm began the meeting by describing how Nottingham currently plans to teach aspects of veterinary public health throughout the integrated and systems based course with a full module being delivered in the fourth year. Complementary skills, including research and communication skills and business methods will be taught throughout the course in Nottingham's Professional and Personal Development module. Modules covering Animal Health and Welfare in the first two years would introduce students to the principles of epidemiology, disease control through biosecurity and animal welfare.

Although the Nottingham course objectives are based on those set out for Veterinary Public Health teaching by EEAVE and the related Royal College of Veterinary Surgeon's (RCVS) Day One competencies there was an opportunity to discuss how well the objectives were able to meet the needs of the vet in the future. Jim Scudamore suggested that the group should make recommendations through the RCVS to EEAVE on future developments on VPH teaching requirements and approaches in the UK.

The 'big picture' aspects of veterinary public health were discussed including the need to emphasise the roles and responsibilities of the veterinarian in society regardless of their specific occupation. There was consensus that students should graduate with a sound perspective of the international impact of trade, politics and

socio-economics on animal health, food production and protection of the environment.

The philosophy and international obligations for individual countries in relation to Veterinary Public Health was described by Sava Buncic. In particular Sava recommended use of the Farm to Fork – or potentially the Fork to Farm approach, taking the consumer as the starting point – as an essential model for teaching Veterinary Public Health. Robin Pooley, representing the Meat Industry described the need for students to understand the historic perspective as well as the current role of the veterinarian in meat production in the UK. Mike Clarke, from the Minster Veterinary Group which will support Nottingham's delivery of the clinical course, suggested that broiler production provided the ideal model for giving the students an understanding of the farm to fork process.

Jane Downes emphasised that, although the roles of veterinarians working in the meat industry are likely to change in the future, strong clinical and pathology skills remain vital for veterinarians working in the food production industries. Alys Bradley agreed that the recognition of disease, such as the diagnosis of foot and mouth disease by one of her former pupils, demonstrates the level of clinical and diagnostic skill which students should attain and understand as essential to veterinary public health.

Teaching on non food-borne infectious disease and zoonoses will also be incorporated in the Veterinary Public Health curriculum but predominantly taught through the systems modules. Susan Shaw from Bristol recommended the importance of clearly marking through all aspects of the course where microbiology was delivered to indicate which infectious agents or commensal organisms were of public health significance. A similar comment was made about teaching on pharmacology where therapeutics could have a potential impact as food residues and/or environmental contaminants.

How the GVS could contribute to supporting delivery of the curriculum through provision of resources, particularly case study materials and directly through teaching was also discussed. Resources from a one day teaching day delivered by Defra and the SVS to the Royal Veterinary College has already been made available to all the vet schools but GVS representatives agreed there is significant existing training materials and methods as well as expertise which could be better shared with the schools. For example a workshop session on risk assessment in animal health delivered to SVS staff would be appropriate for the fourth year course. Megan Power suggested the GVS provide a forum for veterinary public health lecturers to update the schools with resource materials on an annual basis.

Practical exposure to food production systems was also discussed. Representatives agreed that the current requirement of abattoir experience as extra-mural studies required clearer purpose and was considered an on-going problem for most schools. Jane Downes contrasted UK provision with France where large dedicated training facilities are available. The group agreed that poorly structured experience in a food production facility was potentially unsafe, could have an impact on the business and could be educationally limited. Nottingham plans to have formalised classes in abattoirs which follows Dan Tucker's example of their approach in Cambridge. It was agreed that the GVS-Veterinary Schools Liaison Group act as coordinating group to review this issue. Christopher Wood, representing G Wood and Sons abattoir, agreed that there needed to be appropriately trained staff available to support the students in an abattoir environment or it will continue to be a very 'hit or miss' experience.

The meeting concluded with a view that the 'course' title for veterinary public health, given its growing scope, might be better broadened to 'Animals, Society and Environment' or similar. Sava commented on the need for the student to experience and understand veterinary public health as part of a challenging, science based and enjoyable course, delivered with enthusiasm by charismatic people who believe in their work. Judging by the enthusiasm in Nottingham and elsewhere, the future of Veterinary Public Health teaching in the UK looks very bright.