

medical and veterinary sciences facultynews for alumni

WINTER 2005/06

ISSUE 2



The science of animal welfare

Bristol is playing a key role in an £8m programme of research to improve our understanding of the science of animal welfare, announced by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) recently.



The programme consists of three projects which aim to obtain a fundamental insight into the environmental biology, mental experiences, pain and physical health of farm and laboratory animals, to investigate how these are affected by an animal's early experiences, and to develop better ways of environmental management and welfare assessment.

Bristol, along with the University of Oxford and Royal Veterinary College,

will focus on welfare assessment and early life programming. Scientific evidence can bring important objectivity to often heated debates about animal welfare which may be driven by ethical and political concerns. But measuring an animal's welfare – its physical and mental health – is not easy.

'We hope to make real improvements in our understanding of what other animals experience, and in predicting and preventing the onset of welfare problems' - Professor Michael Mendl, Professor of Animal Behaviour and Welfare at Bristol and leader of the research project

Group members will apply knowledge from studies of human mental health to animals, and use mathematical techniques to see which physical symptoms are the best indicators of an animal's mental health. They will also use new video imaging techniques to develop early warning systems for outbreaks of welfare problems on farms, and investigate how experiences of young animals affect their welfare later in life.



Welcome. 2005 was an exciting year for the faculty. January heralded the award of a £4.5m grant to establish a new Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), and the high quality of veterinary teaching was recognised when the Vet School was voted the best in the UK in the 2005 National Student Survey of quality of education.



2005 was also a year of substantial capital investment. At Langford, work began on a new Small Animal Practice building, and plans are being finalised for a new building to house the Animal Welfare Research Group. Meanwhile, the School of Medical Sciences has received a new roof and new animal facilities and about 35 research laboratories have been refurbished. These recent developments will help to maintain the faculty's position as a world leader in teaching and research, well into the future.

Professor Len Hall
Dean of the Faculty of Medical
and Veterinary Sciences

Schools Week in biochemistry

The Department of Biochemistry ran a successful Schools Week in April last year. The theme of the week, organised by Dr Sarah Bailey, was 'The Molecular Basis of Diabetes'. The department has a number of high-profile researchers working in this field.

Transforming teaching

The teaching of medical sciences will be transformed at Bristol with the creation of a new Centre for Excellence for Teaching and Learning. The AIMS Centre (Applied and Integrated Medical Sciences) will pioneer the integration of medical sciences and clinical skills.



CHERRY LEWIS

Proven teaching approaches in anatomy, physiology and pharmacology will be developed to include the latest models, images and simulations of normal and diseased body structure and function.

Resources will include a web-based library of images to aid study of the structure of tissues and organs; a Clinical Anatomy Suite; a state-of-the-art surgical training centre to cater for the training needs of medical and dental undergraduates and surgeons; and computer-driven patient simulators which can simulate conditions such as heart diseases and asthma (left).

Research set to reduce suffering of millions of horses worldwide

New research being carried out by equine welfare charity, the Brooke, together with Bristol's Veterinary School is set to change the health and welfare of millions of working horses and donkeys in some of the poorest parts of the world.

Up until now, there has been limited information available about the welfare of working equines anywhere in the world. Over the last year, the Brooke/Bristol team of expert assessors observed the health, behaviour and welfare of nearly 5,000 working horses, donkeys and mules across five countries – looking at a range of problems, from fear of



COURTESY OF THE BROOKE

humans, to malnutrition, dehydration and lameness. It is the biggest survey of working equines ever to be conducted.

While further welfare assessments are being carried out in new countries of operation, the Brooke/Bristol teams are now evaluating the causes of key health and welfare problems identified by the assessments, and will devise interventions to treat these problems.



alumni profile

Dr Debby Reynolds (BVSc 1975):
Director General for Animal Health and Welfare and Chief Veterinary Officer for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the UK.

Debby Reynolds is the Government's chief spokesperson on animal health and welfare issues in Defra. She is responsible for shaping UK animal health policy and influencing delivery through the State Veterinary Service and other agencies. Another role is to lead on animal disease control.

In her early career Debby was a Veterinary Research Officer at the Institute of Animal Health. She joined the State Veterinary Service in 1984, working in the Veterinary Investigation Service until 1991 and at MAFF until 1994. She was then Head of the Bacteriology Department at the Veterinary Laboratories Agency from 1994-7, before becoming MAFF's Head of Endemic Animal Disease and Zoonoses until she took up her appointment at the Food Standards Agency in 2001.

Debby gained her first degree from Bristol in 1975. She says: 'Five years at Bristol were crammed full of hard academic work and great practical experiences. The environment in the city and at the field station at Langford was superb. But most of all the people made it – our lecturers, the students and local residents. When I go back I immediately feel at home.'

Anatomy expert presents *Coast*

Dr Alice Roberts from the Department of Anatomy was one of a team of experts who presented the BBC's flagship television series *Coast* last year.

Mobile scanner for small animals

A new clinical venture has been launched by the Small Animal Hospital. Regular visits by a mobile magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) facility, owned by a commercial company, Burgess MRI, enables magnetic resonance imaging to be applied to referred patients.

The facility allows detailed visualisation of neural tissues, and enhances diagnostic and prognostic information for animals with neurological and spinal disease. This provides a cutting-edge diagnostic tool of great benefit to patients, as well as developing students' clinical experience in this area.

Right: An anaesthetised boxer dog about to enter the MRI magnet

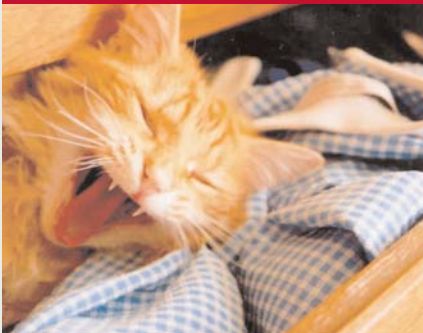


JOHN CONIBEAR

Feline welfare

A new scholarship established by the UK charity Cats Protection and based at the Vet School will further the understanding of feline behaviour, particularly in the rescue environment.

The first Clinical Training Scholarship in Feline Behaviour and Welfare has been awarded to Jenna Kiddie.



Remembering Professor Grunsell

Veterinary alumni will be saddened to hear of the passing of Professor Charles Grunsell. Charles was appointed to the Chair of Veterinary Medicine at Bristol in 1957. As the founder president of the British Cattle Veterinary Association, he was much involved with the World Association of Buiatrics and was awarded the CBE for his services to the veterinary profession.

The Veterinary School has launched the Charles Grunsell Fund in his memory. Contact Head of School Dr Frank Taylor, email f.g.r.taylor@bristol.ac.uk.

inbrief

MEET UP WITH BRISTOL ALUMNI AT THE BSAVA ANNUAL CONGRESS

The Langford Trust and the University are hosting a special event for Bristol Veterinary alumni at the BSAVA Annual Congress in Birmingham this April.



Come along to the Foyer of Hall 6, ICC Birmingham, between 6.30 and 8pm on Thursday 20 April, meet your friends and hear the latest news from Langford. Alternatively use the opportunity as a pre-dinner assembly point and enjoy a glass of wine and canapés in good company. For more information please contact Liz Coombs, tel: +44 (0)7778 765 782.

VETS COME UP WITH THE GOODS

Students at the Vet School raised £1,500 to help equip a spay clinic in Romania.

VETQUEST

The Vet School will once again be holding Vetquest, a workshop specifically designed for Years 11 and 12 students who are considering a career in veterinary science. The workshop, which will be held in March this year, will introduce students to what is involved in a veterinary degree course and to some of the career opportunities.

Fun day out for dogs

Proud dog owners and their pets strutted their stuff at the Veterinary School's Fun Dog Show at Langford in July. Members of the public entered their dogs in a variety of competitions, and as if that wasn't enough entertainment for one day, there was a lunchtime performance from the Canine Capers dancing dog troupe.

Proceeds from the event will be used to help equip a new building for the Small Animal Practice currently under construction. The Small Animal Practice provides veterinary care for the local community and is run by the University as a teaching practice for final-year veterinary students and trainee veterinary nurses.



PHOTOGRAPHIC SERVICE

The John Oldacre Foundation supports research into pain control in cattle

The John Oldacre Foundation is funding a survey that aims to understand farmers' attitudes towards pain and the use of analgesics in cattle.

The use of analgesics in companion animals is routine, but the same cannot be said for cattle. The Bristol research team, led by Dr Becky Whay, hopes that by first understanding the attitudes of farmers, they will then be able to develop appropriate strategies to encourage pain control and promote the use of analgesics in cattle.

Massive investment in clinical facilities

More than £5m will be invested in the Veterinary School's research and clinical facilities over the next two years.

This will include a complete refurbishment of the current Mews Building to house the highly successful Animal Behaviour and Welfare group with a suite of offices, a video editing suite, seminar room and electrical workshop; and a new equine surgery facility with two state-of-the-art operating theatres to complete the Centre of Equine Clinical Excellence.

Vet crowned bog-snorkelling champion

Second-year veterinary student Heidi French is the 2005 Women's Bog Snorkelling Champion. Heidi was only two seconds behind the fastest male bog snorkeller at the World Championships held in Wales in August. She came fourth overall, from a total field of 140 competitors. The competition involved snorkelling two lengths of a 60-yard peat bog trench filled with muddy water, using no recognisable swimming strokes, which Heidi achieved in one minute 46 seconds.

Heidi completed a first degree in zoology at Cardiff University and after a short spell in teaching decided to train to be a vet. She is attempting to raise funds towards her course fees through the charity Veterinary Vouchers, which donates bursaries to help with tuition fees for second-degree veterinary students, and helps pay vet bills for people who can't afford their pets' emergency treatment. On qualifying, students who have received bursaries work for the charity free of charge in their spare time.

For more information, go to: www.makeheidiavet.co.uk.

