



CMA investigation into the veterinary sector - Vet Nation Response

Vet Nation (www.vetnation.co.uk) is a unique collaboration of industry communicators, academics and leaders who have joined forces to better understand the changes in the veterinary profession and find out the real motivations, desires and challenges facing those who have dedicated their working lives to the health of animals.

By bringing together the key online community groups - organisations with a focus to support all those working in the veterinary industry, - alongside a highly respected research group, this collaboration has a greater reach when surveying, analysing and understanding the needs, concerns and expectations of the profession.

The groups supporting Vet Nation include Veterinary Voices UK, the UK's largest veterinary social community, Vets, Stay, Go Diversify, the largest international community supporting vets through their careers, and VetYou, the only independent organisation that is run by and offers financial advice to the profession. It was conducted by Pawvue, an experienced Animal Health research agency.

Vet Nation has recently conducted a comprehensive survey of the profession that was viewed by more than 1000 veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses and veterinary support staff working in areas including clinical practice, research and industry. Almost 600 of these provided valid responses and opinions. The survey covers the following areas; professional opportunities, working life, remuneration, employment challenges, career development and the impact of their work on their personal life.

The survey recorded 276 full responses from veterinary surgeons and 107 from veterinary nurses who work in private clinical practice in the UK. The responses broadly matched the current split of veterinary employers across the veterinary sector - 59% of responses worked in corporate practice, 34% in independent practice and 7% in other roles (academia, government, industry).

The last decade has seen an overall slowing in total veterinary remuneration. Wage inflation slowed in the 10 years to the Coronavirus outbreak, broadly matching the rise in corporatisation in the industry. The post Covid retention crisis in the sector has led to a relative "catch up" in salaries, but there is considerable variability in economic rewards based on geography, type of practice and employer type.

Those responding to the Vet Nation survey had a median income of £25,000-£34,000. Only 30% of respondents recorded that they received a pay rise equal or above inflation in the last 12 months. Despite the challenge of remuneration often not matching inflation, only 23% of respondents were dissatisfied with their pay and benefits package.

More worryingly, over a quarter of respondents (26%) felt they did not have a good work-life balance. An inappropriate work life balance can lead to both physical and mental health challenges and 83% of respondents to the survey agreed that they had at least one sign of compromised mental health. While illness related to mental health of those working in the care industries has increased in recent years, this level of ill health, coupled with the level of dissatisfaction with their working life, appears to be higher in the veterinary sector and at current levels is not sustainable for the profession.

The survey also identified that 56% of respondents had experienced abuse, in the form of bullying or harassment, in the workplace. A number of surveys have documented bullying and harassment in other industrial sectors, but none have recorded this level of abuse. The veterinary sector has a number of unique challenges to ensure a safe workplace and more work needs to be undertaken to reduce the incidence of abuse currently experienced in our clinics and hospitals.

Many veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses are attracted to the sector due to the care focussed nature of the work. Kindness, compassion and empathy are needed to treat animal patients and support their owners. The Vet Nation survey implies that a majority of those working in the sector are not financially driven and that the current financial rewards for most roles are broadly acceptable, even if the remuneration doesn't meet aspirations.

We have built veterinary businesses where the care of animals is paramount; however, it is clear from the Vet Nation Survey that we have not created workplaces where appropriate standards of human care are being met. While the veterinary sector has grown in size and financial returns, our workplaces have not met appropriate human values. It cannot be acceptable that our industry does not match the standards of protection for its employees, to the standards we deliver to the animals 'under our care'.

Backed by the evidence of their recent survey and coupled with the considerable knowledge and experience of the partners, Vet Nation would be delighted to provide further insight into the current challenges faced by the profession and offer solutions to ensure we create a market focussed industry, where employees are productive, satisfied and appropriately cared for.

The Vet Nation Team

Contact@vetnation.co.uk