As Glasgow Vet School celebrates its 150th anniversary, Peter Holmes, Emeritus Professor of Veterinary Physiology and former Vice-Principal for Research at Glasgow University, reflects on the wide opportunities in teaching, research and management provided by veterinary schools.

Veterinary schools can offer a wide range of career opportunities. They provide an exciting environment for teaching some of the brightest and most highly motivated students in the university system and the chance to work in interdisciplinary research teams both nationally and internationally. The latter can be especially stimulating and rewarding.

In my own case I had two early ambitions – to be a vet and to work in Africa – and thanks to Glasgow Veterinary School I achieved both of these aims. My early interest in animals and their biology came from my close involvement in my grandfather’s fellmongery business in East Yorkshire. My passion for working in Africa was inspired by the sporadic visits of a missionary uncle based in what was then Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). Seeing practice with John Crooks and his partners in Beverley reinforced my wish to become a vet and I was fortunate to be admitted into Glasgow Veterinary School in 1961, following an interview chaired by the charismatic William Weipers (who was later knighted).

Glasgow Veterinary School provided a stimulating environment and summer research projects with Jimmy Armour (also later knighted) confirmed my interest in following an academic career. My fellow Yorkshireman in the 1961 intake was Jim Wight, whose father was beginning to develop his writing career as James Herriot.

Interdisciplinary research

In 1966 my appointment to an assistant lectureship with Bill Mulligan (a key member of Glasgow’s “Dictol” team) provided the opportunity to undertake a PhD on the pathophysiology of fascioliasis followed by a secondment to Ethiopia for two years. This was to establish a radioisotope/nuclear techniques facility at Haile Selassie University to investigate tropical parasitic diseases. The project was funded by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). These two developments in my career led to many years of stimulating and productive interdisciplinary research on the pathophysiology and control of parasitic infections, with projects based in Glasgow and collaborative links to colleagues in the UK, Europe and East African veterinary schools and research institutes. Many African postgraduates joined us on these projects and later progressed to senior positions in their home countries.

The close links with UN agencies continued, especially with the IAEA, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Glasgow has always had a strong interest in trypanosomiasis stretching back to original observations by David Livingstone and Muriel Robertson (who were both Glasgow alumni). The expansion of Glasgow’s interest in the control of this devastating disease was led by George Urquhart in the 1970s and Glasgow became an international centre of expertise on this disease. It played a leading role in the development of ILRAD (International Laboratories for Research on Animal Disease) in Nairobi through Max Murray, and the development of the International Trypanotolerance Centre in The Gambia led by Ian McIntyre. Later, I had the privilege of being the founding chair of the International Programme Against African Trypanosomiasis, which is a unique partnership of international agencies including the FAO, WHO, and IAEA. Along with these exciting developments in research and postgraduate training I continued to play a full part in the teaching programme for veterinary students throughout my career, and served as head of department for 19 years.

Vets in senior university management

The developments at Glasgow Vet School have been greatly assisted and promoted by the significant number of university vice-principals from the school. From 1980 onwards, a member of the vet school staff served as a vice-principal to each of the five principals of the University of Glasgow – a record unmatched by any other part of the university.

Bill Mulligan (1980 to 1984) was one of the first vice-principals to be appointed to this new post. He was followed by Sir James Armour (1991 to 1996). I was promoted to vice-principal in 1997 and served for 10 years. Andrew Nash was elected Clerk of Senate in 2002, and later combined this role with that of Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching.
from 2002 to 2004. He was followed in this role by Andrea Nolan in 2004, and in 2009 she became Senior Vice-Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

As vice-principal for research I had the opportunity to interact with colleagues across the whole university and develop the research strategy (as well as the onerous task of leading the preparation of the university’s submission to the research assessment exercise in 2001). As part of the university’s senior management team I became closely involved in the development and implementation of the university’s various programmes including the planning of many new buildings and the recruitment of key staff. In parallel with these duties I became a board member of the Scottish Universities Funding Council and chaired its research and knowledge transfer committee for eight years, during a period of major developments in the research base of Scotland.

**Glasgow ‘Vet 150’**

The vet school in Glasgow has a strong tradition of fundraising for the development of its new facilities including, in recent times, the Weipers Equine Centre, the Scottish Centre for Production Animal Health and Food Safety, and the award-winning small animal hospital. Since my retirement in 2008 I have been pleased to assist by serving as chair of the vet school’s fundraising committee.

This year is especially important for the Glasgow school, its alumni and its fundraising as it celebrates its 150th anniversary with numerous events, culminating in a gala weekend that will be held from October 5 to 7, with a full CPD and social programme (details at www.gla.ac.uk/Vet150).

This is also when our book covering the history of the vet school’s outstanding achievements in veterinary education and research will be launched. It has been a privilege to be a small part of this history.

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**Ten-minute chat**

Jason Aldiss is a member of the BVA Board, which is responsible for the corporate and financial governance and for setting the strategic direction of the Association.

**What made you apply to join the BVA Board?**

The BVA is a splendid organisation and I am proud of our profession. I wanted to give something back to the veterinary profession and make a worthwhile contribution and, while I have very few skills, corporate governance, audit and budgetary rectitude are my ‘thing’. I had been watching developments and progress at the BVA over the years and felt that the time was right to apply for one of the available Board positions. It took several goes – I was pipped at the post on three separate occasions by much better applicants – that is the wonderful thing about democracy!

**How did you get to where you are today?**

I am not sure where I have ‘got to’. Originally I wanted to go to into the legal profession but my father retired from the sea and went to the same law school I would have gone to. He is larger than life and there was no way I could be in the same law class as him, so I opted for vet school instead. I always knew that clinical practice was not my forte and public health was my interest so I did the requisite time in general practice and then applied to work for what was then a small 10-

**What does the BVA Board do?**

The Board’s role is governance – we work to ensure that members’ interests are protected and provide a level of oversight on all areas of activity of the organisation, which have a financial and/or reputational impact. The Board is made up of the officers, four veterinary directors and two non-veterinary directors, one of whom is currently the chairman. In essence, the Board’s role is to apply a firm hand to the tiller and help the executive team steer the good ship BVA through the turbulent financial waters in which we sail. We operate on a not-for-profit basis and we must use our members’ money wisely, efficiently and effectively to promote the profession, increase jobs, opportunities and influence at all levels of government and industry both here and abroad.

**What do you bring to the Board?**

A keen desire to test and challenge all ‘received wisdom’.

**Why is the Board important?**

It is the mechanism by which we as ordinary BVA members can be assured that our professional body is being managed effectively, honestly and appropriately, and that our best interests are protected. We are fortunate to have a splendid team at Mansfield Street and a superb presidential team, and we all work extremely well together in directing the business of the BVA. The Board provides continuity, independence, and assurance on all aspects of corporate governance, providing the members with a high level of confidence in the overall functioning of the BVA.

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The BVA Board is seeking new members. Information packs and nomination forms are available on the BVA’s website, www.bva.co.uk/about_us/BVA_Board.aspx. The closing date for applications is 17.00 on October 15.
Ten-minute chat

Jason Aldiss

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