

The RCVS Mind Matters Initiative:

The story so far...





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Achievements and lessons learned

When the RCVS established the Mind Matters Initiative (MMI) in December 2014, it was a consequence of an increasing number of conversations being had around the significant issues of mental ill-health and poor wellbeing in the veterinary professions, and a recognition that it needed to be tackled in a holistic way.

While organisations existed to help those already in acute crisis and distress, MMI was founded to take a pro-active, wide-ranging and strategic approach to the issues, for example, by raising awareness of commonly-encountered mental health issues, starting training programmes and providing financial and moral support to life-saving mental health charities such as Vetlife.

Ambitious in its scope, MMI has brought together stakeholders and representatives from across the range of the professions to collaborate in its three main workstreams: Prevent, Protect and Support. As MMI moves towards its next phase, this evaluation report will look at some of the key projects established under these three headings, showing how the project's confidence, ambition and reach has grown over time, and with case study examples of the thousands of people it has reached through its various means.

The case studies outline the key challenges and problems we sought to address, what we did, the impact we made, and how the lessons we learned will shape the future direction of MMI. To learn more about MMI, we hope you will visit our website. For more about what's next for MMI, you can read our five-year plan, which was developed alongside this review.

We don't do this work in isolation: the work we are most proud of would not have been possible without the support and collaboration of other individuals and organisations who share our goals and values. I would like to particularly thank my fellow members of the Mind Matters Taskforce, the Taskforce's three previous chairs, and all the RCVS staff who have worked on this project. Everyone involved has been impacted in one way or another by issues around mental ill-health, and it is these experiences that drive forward the passion and



“Ambitious in its scope, MMI has brought together stakeholders and representatives from across the range of the professions”

dedication which all involved have shown towards the project, recognising its potential to better, and even save, people's lives.

We remain grateful to everyone who has been involved with MMI over the past almost nine years, and look forward to working with a diverse range of collaborators – both long-established and newly-forged – in the years to come.



Kate Richards
RCVS Senior Vice-President and MMI Chair



Prevent:

Through our prevent workstream, we have explored systemic, contextual and cultural factors that are relevant to veterinary mental health. Activities were chosen to address one – or both – of the workstream’s two key aims:

- a) **To better understand and begin to address the reasons for poor mental wellbeing within the veterinary industry; and**
- b) **To raise awareness of mental health, tackle stigma, and promote help-seeking.**

How we delivered

Aim 1: Understanding and addressing poor mental wellbeing in the veterinary professions

Prevent case study 1: Sarah Brown Mental Health Research Grants

Where did we start?

Sarah Brown was a much-loved daughter, sister, friend, veterinary surgeon and RCVS Council member. She was passionate about working to support the mental health of the veterinary professions. Following her death in 2017, we launched these grants in her memory in 2019, with the blessing of her family.

Through these grants, we aimed to advance veterinary mental health research and, in doing so, make a contribution to improving the overall mental health of the professions.

What did we do?

We committed to awarding five £20,000 grants to fund research focusing on prevention, diagnosis, intervention and treatment in relation to the mental health of the veterinary professions. In 2020, we repurposed surplus budget made available by cancelled in-person events during the pandemic which allowed us to make an additional award, bringing the total number of funded projects up to six.

To date, five out of these six grants have been made, as follows:

- How farm vets cope: An exploration of how vets cope with the daily challenges of farm animal practice and how best these coping mechanisms might be developed into tools which can be easily accessed by the livestock veterinary community – Dr Kate Stephen (Scotland’s Rural College)
- Experiences and impact of moral injury in UK veterinary professional wellbeing – Dr Victoria Williamson and Dr Neil Greenberg (King’s College London)

- Experiences of racism and its impacts on mental wellbeing in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people working and studying in the UK veterinary profession – Victoria Crossley (Royal Veterinary College), and Navaratnam Partheeban (British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society)
- Identifying and addressing workplace stressors for autistic veterinary professionals – Dr Kirstie Pickles and Dr Brad Hill (University of Nottingham)
- The effectiveness of online compassionate imagery intervention in improving the psychological wellbeing of veterinarians – Dr Katherine Wakelin (University of Surrey)

What was the impact?

As our reputation for funding high-quality, impactful research projects has grown, engagement with our Sarah Brown Grants increases year-on-year. In 2022, we received a record of 42 individual expressions of interest, of which 20 went on to make a full application.

At the time of publication, 100% of our first four grant-funded research projects have been completed successfully, with our fifth now beginning to recruit for participants.

Dr Kate Stephen’s research on farm vets’ mental health has led to the launch of the [howfarmvetsscope.co.uk](https://www.howfarmvetsscope.co.uk) resource, which highlights the lived experience of farm vets and shares messages of hope and solidarity as tools for combatting isolation.

Researchers funded by our Sarah Brown Grant have collectively published three peer-reviewed journal papers, with two more currently in review.

All grant recipients have presented their findings at MMI mental health research symposia, reaching over 300 engaged delegates. Videos from these proceedings are available on our website.

Findings from our grant-funded research have helped shape what MMI does and how we do it. Our neurodiversity hub, inclusion and diversity training, and rural outreach project have all been inspired and informed by research carried out by our grant recipients.

What did we learn?

- Feedback from both grant applicants and from those who registered interest but ultimately chose not to apply, taught us that some researchers with outstanding ideas were being put off by the requirement to submit a formal research proposal. We also learned that we needed to be clearer and more specific about what we were seeking. For 2023, we adjusted our application process and introduced an application form that provides clearer guidance for applicants and levels the playing field for early career researchers.
- Veterinary mental health research has most impact when findings can be translated into real-life, practical implications. We have learned that we need to support our applicants to better articulate the potential real-world

impact of their research. Our new application explicitly asks applicants to consider this, and it will form part of the selection / awarding process.

- Although the large majority of grant applications come from within the veterinary community, the highest quality applications that receive our funding are often made by researchers from other specialisms or researchers already working in areas of mental health or workplace-based wellbeing. Many excellent ideas from within the veterinary community are going unfunded because applicants have difficulty navigating the leap from veterinary to human health research.

What next?

2023 will see us award our final Sarah Brown Grant, which we will mark at our MMI Mental Health Research Symposium this autumn. We will be publishing a report outlining all that has been achieved in Sarah's memory.

This year we will also be launching our new veterinary mental health grant programme, which will continue and build upon all that has been achieved by the Sarah Brown Grants. This will be launched alongside a full suite of resources and guidance for veterinary mental health researchers, including those who are just starting out in their research career.

In 2021 we launched a survey that asked student and newly-qualified vet nurses about studying, being on placement, starting their career and what impacted on their wellbeing. This included a large number of free-text response boxes to allow us to capture rich qualitative data that allowed for thematic analysis.

The findings from our survey pointed to four key areas that were impacting on SVN mental health and wellbeing. In November 2021 we held an online SVN discussion forum to further explore these themes and identify potential approaches to addressing them.

What was the impact?

Our survey received just under 700 responses. Some of our findings were stark and pointed to areas where urgent attention and action was needed. Our finding that 96% of respondents believed bullying and incivility to be a problem in the professions was widely reported and caused industry-wide concern. We set about addressing this issue by launching civility training in

collaboration with Vet Nurse (VN) Futures and the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA). We have since gone on to develop a Civility Hub on the MMI website to house links to useful resources on the impact of incivility and psychological safety in the workplace. We also ran a series of VN Think Tanks and a Safe to Speak Up social media campaign in 2022, which aimed to start conversations around psychological safety in the workplace, and which included a full day of workshops run by training consultancy VetLed.

To date, just under 170 people have completed our civility and psychological safety training. Among these, 35% told us they signed up because they wanted to support others who were being bullied in the workplace. A further 15% told us they had experienced bullying themselves and 39% told us they could identify times their own behaviour had tipped over into incivility. We asked our delegates to complete pre-, post-, and three month post-training surveys, achieving a completion rate of 98%, 91% and 62% respectively. Results are as indicated below:

Prevent case study 2: Understanding the experiences of student veterinary nurses

Where did we start

In 2021, we identified a gap in the veterinary community's collective understanding of the specific issues faced by student and newly-qualified veterinary nurses. We knew from our interactions with the professions that student vet nurses (SVNs) are among the most vocal and active champions for mental health (for example, they are by far the top scorers on our Mental Health Quiz!) and that they work hard to support each other in their studies and on placement. However, we also recognised we had work to do on better understanding the issues that mattered to them, and what support they needed from us, from their educational establishments and from the placement providers/ clinical coaches.

What did we do?

Having held a successful roundtable with veterinary surgeon students and educators in 2019, we began considering how we could replicate this model for SVNs. However, we soon realised that – although discussions about veterinary students' mental health had been ongoing for years – the engagement with student vet nurses lagged behind a little. We knew we needed to address this, and that we needed a way for student vet nurses to contribute directly. Having supported the Association of Veterinary Students (AVS) 'VetKind' student wellbeing event since 2018, we began by ensuring veterinary nursing students were invited to this annual event from 2019 onwards.

Survey responses: Civility and psychological safety training



The RCVS Mind Matters Initiative: the story so far



What did we learn?

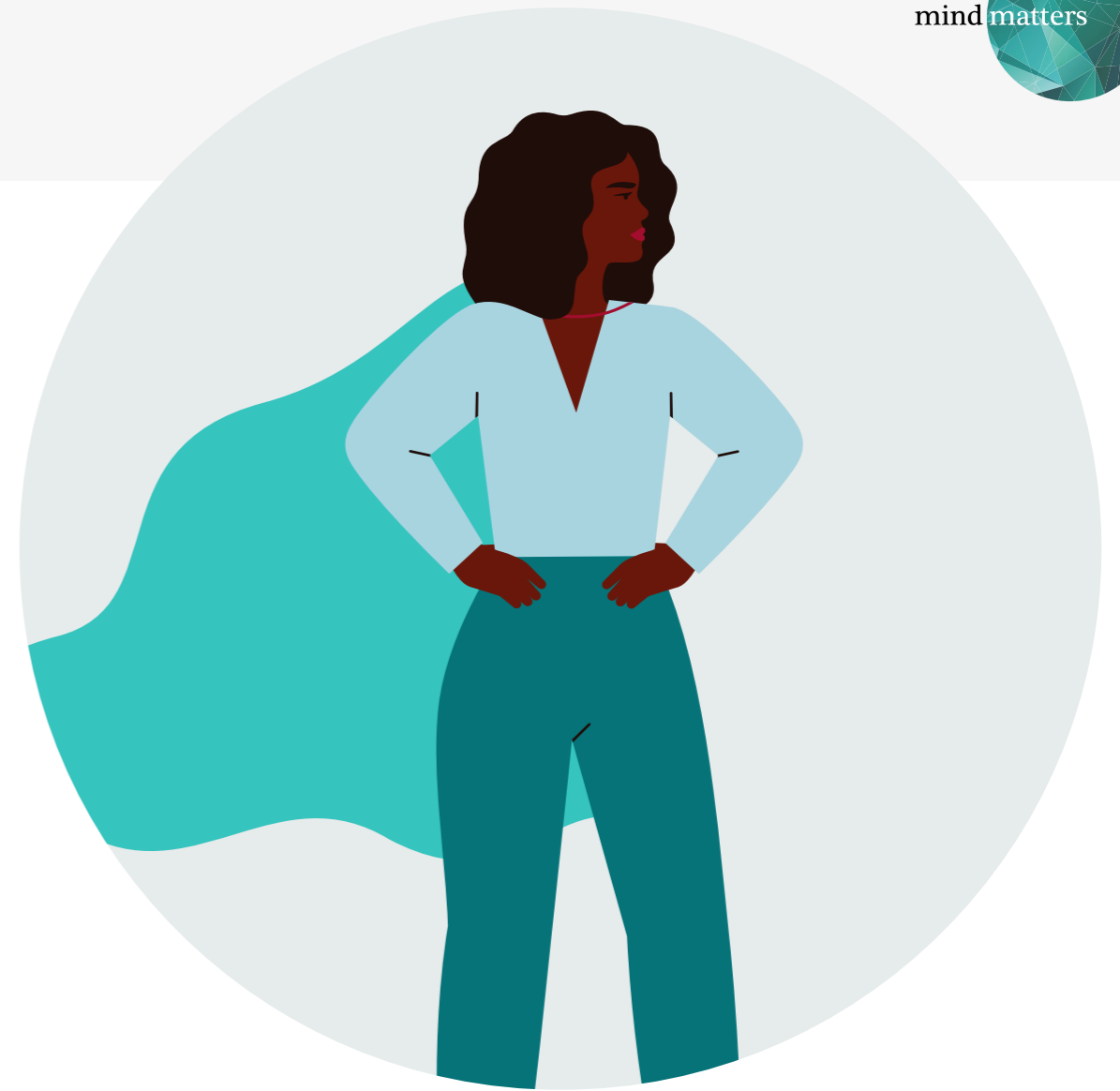
The success of our SVN discussion forum has highlighted the importance of enabling accessibility through direct consultation with the audiences we want to reach.

While our survey highlighted challenges within the profession, it also highlighted the immense pride student and newly-qualified nurses have in their work. Our survey was long and included a large number of free-text response boxes. It was important to establish a baseline for this research, so that we and others can build on the data collated. We had feared this length would lead to low completion rates or complaints that it was overly onerous. Instead, we were delighted with the detail, consideration and care taken over the responses. Far from complaints, the comment that best reflected feedback we

received was: 'Thank you. This is the first time anyone has ever asked SVNs about how things are for us.'

What next?

Having focused our initial response on the urgent issue of workplace incivility and bullying, we will now begin addressing the other topics highlighted by our survey and discussion forum, including: juggling demands, raising awareness, and encouraging pride. We will also look to replicate the success of this targeted engagement with other lesser-heard voices within the veterinary community. As we do so, we must strike a balance between inclusion and accessibility (whereby we include veterinary nurses and SVNs in all we do), and the need for targeted approaches (where we respond to their specific needs through smaller, bespoke events and activities).



Prevent case study 3: Wellbeing awards

Where did we start?

Our workplaces have a huge impact on our mental health and wellbeing, and there are many veterinary workplaces with excellent strategies for making sure this impact is positive. However, in the earlier years of MMI, we recognised there were very few opportunities for workplaces to celebrate and share best practice.

What did we do?

In 2016, MMI partnered with the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS) to create the Vet Wellbeing Awards. These awards aimed to recognise and celebrate practices with systems and initiatives that motivated and engaged their staff, and who could demonstrate their commitment to being a place of work in which staff wellbeing is supported. Our judging criteria were informed by the research of Elinor O'Connor, Professor of Work and Occupational Psychology at Alliance Manchester Business School. The awards ran for four years, with three awards made each year.

What was the impact?

We were able to capture and share examples of practical steps being taken to support wellbeing in veterinary workplaces. These were shared through a series of Wellbeing Award booklets, which showcased examples from the winning submissions. Real-life examples were also included in our *Guide to enhancing wellbeing and managing stress in the veterinary workplace*, which we developed in collaboration with Professor O'Connor. In 2019, MMI ran a roadshow in collaboration with SPVS and the Veterinary Management Group (VMG). These were entitled 'Vet Wellbeing in Practice' and included case studies from Wellbeing Award winners detailing how they had incorporated measures to support and improve wellbeing in their workplace.

The learning from these awards proved invaluable when MMI was asked to support the Practice Standards Scheme in introducing new requirements around mental health and wellbeing. These came into force in 2021 and are now fully integrated into Practice Standards at Core level.

What did we learn?

Challenges within veterinary workplaces are well documented, but these awards highlighted that we also need to recognise, celebrate and share what is working, and the impact that can be made with small changes. The importance of best practice around workplace wellbeing has continued to be a focus for MMI, and further reinforced across all our activities, and particularly our targeted resources aimed at specific workplace challenges. An example of this is was our Schwartz Round pilot where staff from seven practices were trained in reflective practice, as well as the short animation we developed in collaboration with the British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA), which addressed wellbeing in an equine practice context

What next?

Our *Guide to enhancing wellbeing and managing stress in the veterinary workplace* will soon be updated to ensure its content remains relevant and accurate. We will continue to support veterinary workplaces to develop best practice around mental health, through our training (particularly for line managers) and resources. We continue to work hard to ensure our resources are accessible. The pilot phase of our Kite app, which included bite sized learning on many of the topics highlighted within the Wellbeing Awards, showed us the importance of making sure our content is not just high quality, but delivered in a format that is useful and engaging for our audience. Following feedback and data from our pilot phase of the Kite app, we took the decision to move our content from the app onto 'hubs' within our website, allowing them to be accessed by anyone and read and digested at the reader's own pace.

The RCVS Mind Matters Initiative: the story so far



Aim 2: Understanding and addressing poor mental wellbeing in the veterinary professions

Prevent case study 4: &Me

Where did we start?

We saw widespread mental health stigma within the veterinary professions, along with the belief that being open about mental health struggles could make it difficult to progress in one's career. We recognised that there was a lack of positive role models sharing stories of hope following diagnosis, and that this was not unique to veterinary, but true across other helping professions. This was highlighted at our Medical Minds Matters event which was attended by 100 members of the veterinary, pharmaceutical, dental and medical professions. Joining forces with Dr Louise Freeman of the Doctors' Support Network, we came together to create &Me, to help spread the message that experiencing mental health difficulties did not need to define your future career.

What did we do?

In 2017, MMI launched the &Me anti-stigma campaign at the House of Commons in conjunction with the Doctors' Support Network, a peer support service for physicians with mental health concerns. &Me encouraged prominent members of the veterinary and medical professions to share experiences of mental ill-health. In order to reach as many of the professions as possible not only was this content shared at various veterinary events, such as the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) Congress, but also as part of a long running social media campaign. This ensured that there was the potential for global reach and interaction on this subject, as it is not just the UK where this is happening.

What was the impact?

A total of 17 &Me blog posts were released and publicised on social media. These stories have been the catalyst for honest, open discussion, with one gaining 25,000 views on Facebook.

What did we learn?

Although some issues such as the impact of performing euthanasia are veterinary-specific, other professions share many of the same challenges. Sharing narratives from outside the veterinary sphere allows us to broaden our perspective, learn from others, and spread the message that the vet professions are not alone. It was helpful to demonstrate solidarity across healthcare professions, as this is a reminder of why the RCVS delivers MMI, but also to support One Health as a global concept. It is also good to encourage the healthcare professions to exchange ideas, both for our members to recognise the similarities faced, but also for the human medical world to appreciate the situations that veterinary professionals find themselves in. Furthermore, it is hoped that by building these relationships, there will be a greater level of interest in undertaking research into veterinary mental health such as through applications to our grants programme or symposium. Delivering the &Me programme has allowed MMI to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the valuable role lived experience can play in our work moving forward.

What next?

We will be forever grateful to our &Me participants who have shared their stories with us. Our five-year plan confirms our intention to listen – and learn from – lived experiences of mental ill health. We will continue to showcase stories and narratives that offer a message of hope and recovery, while beginning to also talk more about what it means to experience severe and enduring mental illness.

We will also continue to seek out opportunities to collaborate with other professions.



Prevent case study 5: Support for awareness-raising campaigns

Where did we start?

We wanted to raise awareness of mental health, address stigma, and grow a veterinary community where these topics are regularly discussed. While we recognise that awareness-raising is only part of the solution for improving mental health and wellbeing, it is a vital first step. This is particularly in the UK veterinary context where stigma (including self-stigma) and lack of awareness were still proving to be barriers to seeking and receiving help.

What did we do?

Since MMI began, we have supported a wide range of national and international campaigns. Full details of these are on our website, but a selection from the last few years include:

Mental Health Foundation's Mental Health Awareness Week

2021 - Nature

We marked the week with a creative competition on the links between the natural world, and our mental health and wellbeing.

2022 - Loneliness

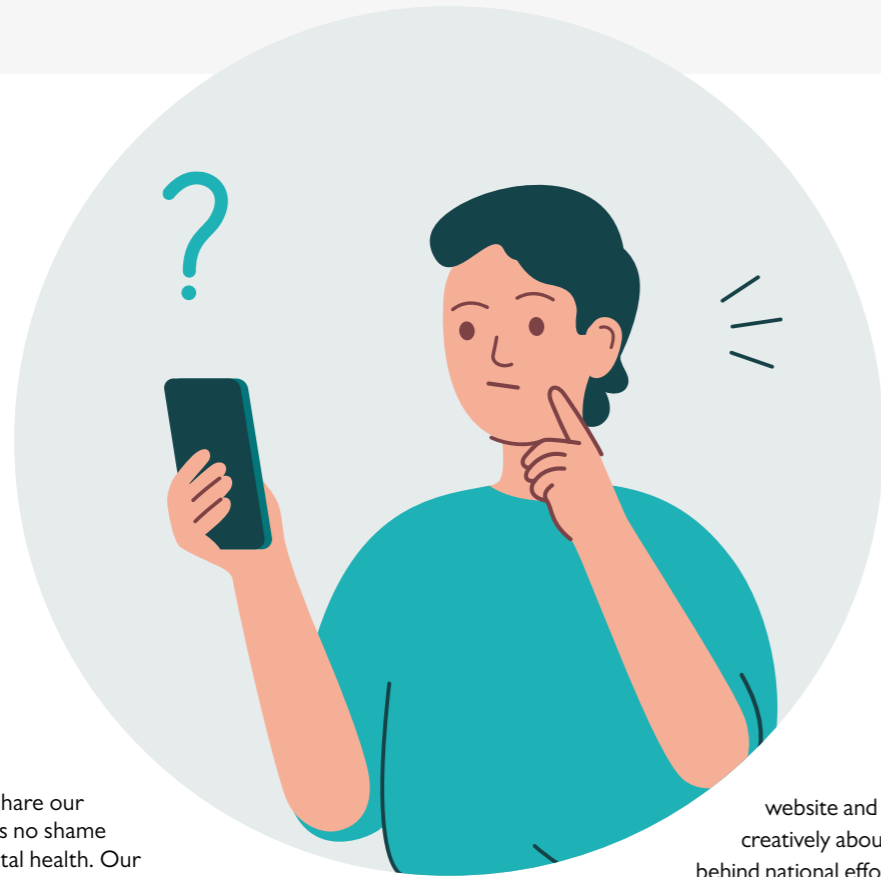
This campaign included a Campfire Chat special on the theme of loneliness, another creative competition on the theme of Connection, and a 'Let's Get Connected' blog.

Neurodiversity Celebration Week 2022

As part of Neurodiversity Celebration Week in March 2022, we created a Neurodiversity Resource Hub, and held a talk on neurodiversity at BSAVA Congress.

What was the impact?

Our activities during awareness weeks allow us to engage with the professions, have open conversations on social media



and in-person, and share our message that there is no shame in talking about mental health. Our support for these campaigns has allowed us to reach:

- Over 500 people via our Neurodiversity Resource Hub in less than a year;
- Over 40 people via our 2021 creative competition, including two from overseas, allowing us to create an online resource to showcase entries;
- Over 250 delegates via our MMI Reflection time sessions launched to mark the 'Kindness' themed Mental Health Awareness Week in 2020, with honest discussions on topics including 'Juggling it all' and 'Believing in myself'. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive with 92% describing the topics as relevant or extremely relevant, and 86% indicating they would welcome further opportunities to come together online;
- Our 'loneliness' themed Campfire Chat was one of our most popular yet, with 72 registrations.

What did we learn?

Taking part in awareness weeks allows us to gain momentum for our campaigns, projects and resources, drives people to our

website and allows us to think creatively about how we can get behind national efforts to improve mental health. They allow us to trial small-scale, one-off projects – like competitions – to gauge interest and whether they resonate with the professions. They also demonstrated the power of targeted campaigns as a way to enhance inclusivity, for example our work during Neurodiversity Celebration Week. Our audience told us they enjoyed being able to share their experiences, learn from each other, and be a part of a community with common goals of education and support.

What now?

We will continue to support awareness campaigns, and use them as an opportunity to further develop our bank of resources. Moving forward, we must now make sure we are clear on what we hope to achieve with each campaign, and that we can measure impact with clearly defined measures. With so many awareness days, we must ensure we focus on those that are fully aligned with our aims, where we can ensure (and measure) impact, and where we are able to translate social media shares into engagement with our resources, events and training.

We have been delighted to see overall levels of mental health awareness increasing, both in the professions and in the public as a whole. We must ensure we are ready to build on this growing awareness with messaging and resources that support a deeper understanding.

Summary: Prevent stream

Our prevent workstream has played a vital role in MMI's work, and we are immensely proud of all that has been achieved through its programme of awareness-raising, research, and knowledge transfer. While not an exhaustive list of activities, the case studies above give a clear taste for how we have been able to identify problems, knowledge gaps and opportunities, rapidly respond to them, and then refine or develop these responses as we learn more. Many of MMI's core projects started out in our prevent stream, as a smaller one-off trial of a new idea. For example, our successful Campfire Chats have built upon our Covid-19 Reflection Time series, which showed us the value of an online,

reflective space, and taught us more about what our audience needed from it. Likewise, our one-off research into the needs and experiences of SVNs has become the catalyst for a robust programme of work on civility, nursing and inclusion - which is now fully embedded into our work.

Our learning from the last nine years of running the prevent stream at MMI has allowed us to clarify and refine our plans for the future. Some of the key lessons we've learned are outlined below. Through this learning, we have been able to articulate and define the core purpose of prevent, and identify three key themes that we must focus on within it.

We have learned...	It matters because...	So our five-year plan outlines our commitment to:
...that discrimination, incivility and bullying still occur in some veterinary workplaces	...mental health cannot thrive in psychologically unsafe environments, and this can lead to mental ill health, burnout and retention issues.	Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Civility
...that veterinary leaders frequently report lacking the confidence to effectively manage mental health at work	...when we bolster their skills and knowledge, managers can play a crucial role in protecting and supporting workplace wellbeing and feel empowered to make lasting changes for all team members.	Leadership
...that the people we interact with are increasingly ready to have more nuanced conversations about mental health	...we have the opportunity to move the narrative beyond awareness and towards deeper, broader understandings of mental health and mental illness. This in turn creates more inclusive and welcoming environments in our places of work and education.	Widening the conversation

We have learned that our prevent stream must continue to champion systemic and organisational responses to mental health.



Protect

Through our protect stream, we have delivered a varied programme of training, resources, collaborations and events designed to equip the veterinary professions with the tools and knowledge to stay well, even in challenging circumstances. To help us meet this ambition, we have continued to build opportunities for collaboration and engagement with the professions, with 2022 seeing us deliver a programme of events and visits through MMI's Outreach and Engagement Plan. This section looks at how we have delivered on our Prevent stream aims:

- a) **To equip the veterinary professions with the tools and knowledge they need**
- b) **Outreach, engagement and collaboration**

How we delivered

Aim 1: Equipping the veterinary professions with the tools and knowledge they need

Protect case study 1: MMI training

Where did we start?

From its earliest days MMI has always been keen to promote high-quality, evidence-based training and education as part of its activities. This has been an opportunity to help people engage with tough topics, encourages people to trial different training approaches and builds general awareness of what could be achieved with high quality training. It is also hoped that, through using trainers with leading accreditations and backgrounds in successful delivery to other professions, the veterinary community would see this as valuable CPD alongside their clinical or technical CPD.

What did we do?

Our training programme has had two distinct phases. From 2015 to 2021, we ran training on mental health awareness, as well as resilience training and training for managers, the latter jointly with VMG. These were initially run on a pilot basis. It was important to spend time developing and building understanding of the broader topics and the language being used, as this foundation enabled us to then go into more detailed areas subsequently. In 2022, following an extensive pilot, we launched a new programme of training on a wider range of topics. These included a large number of highly-subsidised or free sessions, targeted sessions for specialist groups (for example, rural vets, vet nursing students) and online sessions in order to ensure our offering continued to remain accessible. Alongside our more formal training, we have also delivered an extensive programme of webinars, including our online mindfulness and sleep series, hosted by Webinar Vet. Our second mindfulness series had a total of 2,500 views across five countries, while our sleep series had nearly 500 subscribers across 13 countries. Alongside these, we have held webinars on a range of topics as varied as anxiety; self-harm; OCD; eating disorders and the impact of exercise on mental health.

What was the impact?

2015 to 2021: Mental health awareness and resilience training

Our mental health awareness training explored common signs and symptoms of mental ill-health, how to talk to someone who might be struggling, and how to effectively signpost. Our resilience training supported delegates to develop ways to bolster and protect their own emotional wellbeing, by drawing on tools and strategies that can help to keep us well.

“Our resilience training supported delegates to develop ways to bolster and protect their own emotional wellbeing”

We ran 70 mental health awareness courses, over 50% in partnership with BSAVA, covering approximately 1,800 delegates. Feedback forms were collected from all attendees, with excellent feedback as illustrated below.

We ran 24 resilience courses for just under 650 delegates, with over half of these attended by staff and students from vet schools across the UK. These were well received with feedback also illustrated below. Training providers were selected following a tendering process, with pilots being held UK-wide.

Survey responses: Mental health awareness training



2022 onwards

In 2021 we made the decision to refresh and expand our training offer, and invited training providers to tender to work with us. All providers were assessed according to how well they reflected the values and goals of MMI, the relevance of their training, and how well their training offer matched the NHS Public Mental Health Training Quality Marker Checklist. We also ran a pilot of each training topic to ensure feedback was positive. In early 2023, we announced our full training programme on a wide range of topics relevant to veterinary mental health. These pilots were fully subsidised by MMI and made free to ensure they remained as accessible as possible. As with our in-person training, safeguarding remained of utmost importance and all trainers were expected to have robust safeguarding policies in place. They were also briefed on veterinary-specific sources of support and requested to signpost to these throughout their training.

All training delegates are invited to complete pre-, post-, and three-month post-training surveys so that we can monitor the extent to which learning objectives are being met. Our most current (as of February 2023) feedback data from across our training programmes is presented below.

Mental Health First Aid

We have welcomed just under 300 delegates to our Mental

Health First Aid and Mental Health First Aid Champion training. This is delivered by MHFA England and gives an accredited certificate at the end of the course. Over 10% of those receiving this training were rural vets, as part of our targeted outreach and ongoing development of a supportive network for the rural veterinary community. Aggregated feedback from across our Mental Health First Aid training is illustrated below.

Introduction to diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) and unconscious bias

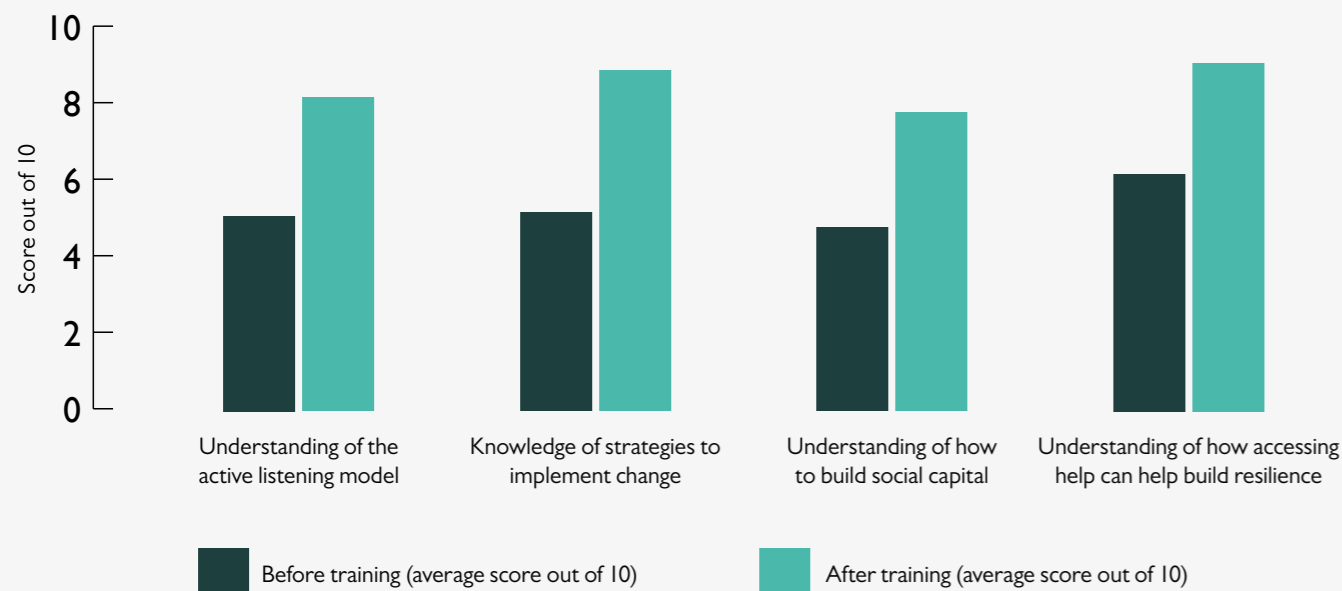
This training was delivered by experts (professional and lived experience) in the field of DEI, and gave a comprehensive introduction to issues around diversity and inclusion, particularly in the workplace. It supported delegates to understand how to recognise and address discrimination and bias, both in themselves and others. The key learning objectives for these sessions are highlighted in the graphs below, along with delegate feedback on how successfully these were delivered.

To date, 36 delegates have completed this training since 2022 with more to be rolled out from autumn 2023.

Inclusive leadership

This course was for anyone in a management or leadership role, and provided a supportive space to explore how principles

Survey responses: Resilience training



Survey responses: Mental Health First Aid training



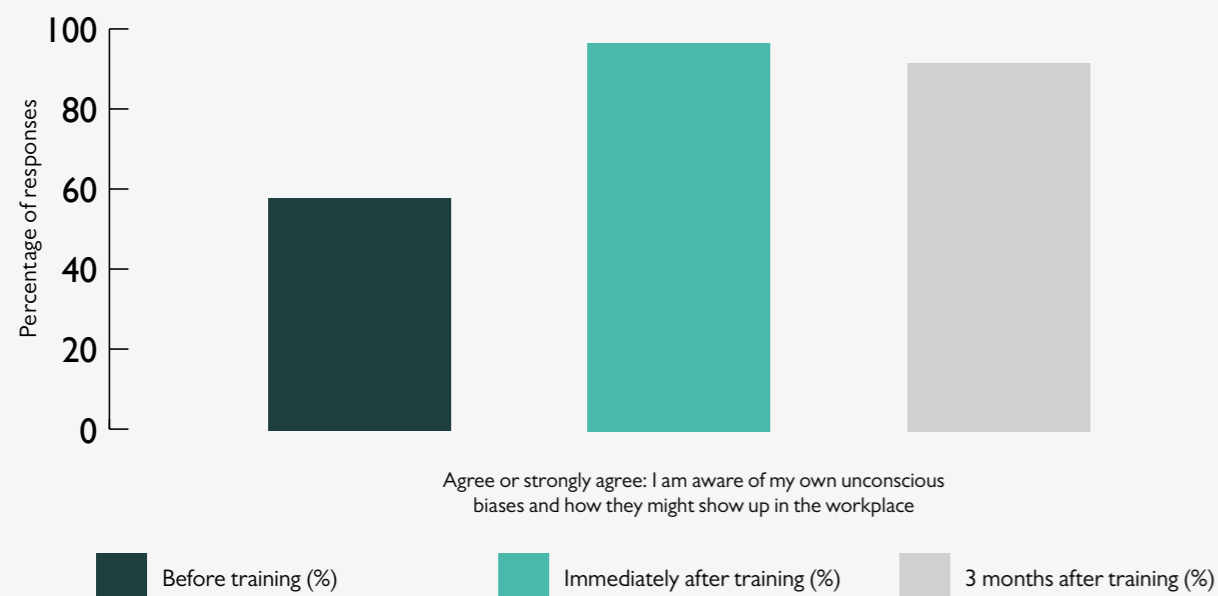
Survey responses: Introduction to DEI and unconscious bias training



Survey responses: Sustaining your emotional health training



Survey responses: Inclusive leadership training



of inclusion and diversity could be incorporated into their everyday leadership practice. We have welcomed 59 delegates to our inclusive leadership training. In addition to the learning outcome illustrated below, 100% of delegates reported that the training had helped them towards becoming a more inclusive leader.

Sustaining your emotional health

Our training on sustaining emotional health courses support delegates to begin to develop tools and resources that they can draw on in difficult times, to support their wellbeing. Key learning objectives (and delegate feedback on how successfully the course delivered these) are illustrated in the graph below. The course remains one of our most consistently popular training programme, highlighting the value of supporting individuals to develop their own personal wellbeing 'toolbox'.

We have been delighted to welcome 240 delegates to this training since early 2022.

Managing stress in practice

This training was rolled out in recognition of the unique stressors that come with working in veterinary practice. It is designed to equip delegates with the skills to identify when their stress levels are rising and take steps to address these. 119

delegates attended our managing stress in practice training. At registration, 60% of delegates felt they had a good understanding of the topic, increasing to 92% immediately post-training.

What did we learn?

Feedback from attendees has been invaluable, and following up at three months has allowed us to better assess how well learning is being embedded and utilised on an ongoing basis. Feedback from delegates has allowed us to be confident that our training meets its objectives and is providing tangible learning outcomes that can be applied to real-life.

What next?

While feedback has been outstanding, our next goal is to ensure we are effectively marketing our training to all sectors of the veterinary community. As part of this, we will be continuing our focus on working with groups who may experience specific challenges – as we have with rural vets. We will continue to ensure our training is thoroughly evaluated on an ongoing basis, and will continue to seek delegate feedback. New training will be announced towards the end of 2023, and will include training on a wide selection of topics to be delivered throughout 2024 – both in-person and online.

Aim 2: Outreach, engagement, collaboration

Protect case study 2: Campfire chats



Where did we start?

Following the success of our online Reflection Time sessions, we knew there was high demand for a safe, online space for people to come together, reflect, and share experiences. These were launched during the second Covid-19 lockdown in the UK, a period when it was recognised that many opportunities to decompress, focus on personal wellbeing, or socialise were removed, and yet it was a time when people needed these the most. These challenges were compounded by school closures, access to medical and mental health support proving difficult, and other restrictions. It was an opportunity to look at innovative ways to engage with the community, to help provide spaces for conversations that were being missed and to demonstrate that MMI was understanding of these issues.

What did we do?

In January 2021, we launched our MMI Campfire Chats. We were committed to making these safe, welcoming spaces for all members of the veterinary community.

For each of the sessions, we have had a chair and a guest panel who have spoken openly and honestly about their experiences and feelings regarding the topic in question. They ran for an hour, and delegates were encouraged to share their experiences and questions for the panel in the chat function. The sessions were not recorded, as these needed to be a protected time for sharing of personal reflections. Furthermore, delegates were encouraged to dial in, even if they couldn't actively participate. It was recognised that many were experiencing overwhelming emotions, and if all they could manage was to listen, then we were fulfilling the purpose. The panel was originally made up of vets and nurses, however as we expanded into broader topics it was felt that experts such as mental health professionals should be brought in to ensure that the evidence-based approach continued into this activity, and also to shine a light on the similarities between the professions.

Following each session, a list of resources and top tips would be shared with the delegates, as this enabled them to focus on the content and not on making notes. These are now available on the MMI website for anyone to access at any time.

Considerable effort has been put in to ensuring that intersectionality has been considered when curating the panel speakers and the questions posed. An example of this is running a cross-over campfire with the RCVS Diversity and Inclusion Group to support Black History Month.

We have addressed a wide and varied range of topics:

Series One:

- Online communities and beating isolation
- Pandemic parenting
- Chronic health conditions and Covid-19
- Supporting students and new grads
- Leadership

Series Two

- Managing mental health and menopause
- Combatting climate change anxiety
- Men's mental health
- Working through winter

Series Three

- Celebrating diversity
- The joy of creativity
- Overcoming self-doubt and stressing out
- Identity – who am I away from work?
- Saying goodbye letting go and learning to grow
- Tackling loneliness in a hyperconnected world

Series Four

- Navigating change
- Social media and mental health
- Translating word into actions
- Letting go of perfect
- Maintaining balance

We have also hosted three in-person Campfire Chats at BSAVA to trial this type of content. These were positively received, and attracted a diverse audience.

What was the impact?

Our Campfire Chats have been extremely well received, with positive feedback. Since 2021, we have run four series, with a fifth to launch in autumn 2023.

What did we learn?

Our Campfire Chats have shown us the value of open, welcoming conversations, and how supportive the members

of the veterinary community can be to each other. We have learned that our audience is eager to engage more with varied, challenging and thought-provoking topics. We know our Campfire Chats are most valuable when they are hosted by diverse, well-informed (whether through professional expertise or lived experience) panels. Furthermore from the levels of participant interaction in these session, and the sharing of deeply personal experiences, it is clear that the MMI brand is trusted to deliver these sessions safely and with the respect that they deserve.

What next?

We will continue our Campfire Chats going forward, however it is likely that their format will evolve based on everything we have learned over the last two years. It is also important to see how we can be more agile with the topics, and provide opportunities for collaboration with other RCVS projects and organisations to ensure that mental health continues to be embedded and considered. There is also the aim to increase their reach, while capturing the learning they create. A new series will launch in autumn 2023.

Aim 2: Outreach, engagement, collaboration

Protect case study 3: MMI International

Where did we start?

We recognised that poor mental health was an issue affecting the veterinary professions right across the world. While we were aware of other international organisations delivering outstanding work in this area, we were at risk of working in silos, without a mechanism for sharing learning or best practice.

What did we do?

In 2018 the RCVS joined forces with the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and agreed to collaborate under the banner Mind Matters International, with both organisations signing up to a joint statement outlining our commitment to mental health.

Since 2018, a further 11 national, pan-national or international veterinary organisations have joined us by signing our statement. Those applying to join must outline what they are doing to support the mental health of their veterinary community. Each organisation that has signed up to the joint commitment needs to report in once a year to update the group on what they have achieved, and what more they are planning, under the three headings of Prevent, Protect and Support.

In March 2021, we held an International Roundtable where delegates considered the impact of Covid-19 on veterinary mental health. A further event was held in September 2021 to present case studies on veterinary mental health initiatives from across the globe and share successes from which we could all learn. A third roundtable took place in March 2022,

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to look at both the impact of the veterinary workforce crisis on mental health, and the impact of mental health on the workforce crisis.

What was the impact?

The sessions were aimed at those from regulators, representative bodies, government veterinary departments and educational establishments. Around 25-30 delegates attended each session, representing organisations from Europe, the Americas, New Zealand and Australia, and Africa. Discussion was open, honest and lively, with delegates commenting afterwards how useful it was to share the issues they were facing and learn what others were doing to address similar problems. The sessions were largely rated 'excellent' in post-event feedback, with the only common criticism being that more time was needed than the two-hours allocated, as there was so much to discuss.

What did we learn?

It's clearly valuable for those trying to support veterinary professionals' mental health to come together to share their

challenges, strategies and successes – and also what has not worked. Being part of an international group that has all signed up to the same commitment also brings the support of numbers and can help individual countries in making the case for funding and support for their veterinary teams.

What next?

By developing an international community of like-minded organisations, we hope that we can continue to spread the reach and impact of Mind Matters' work, and are laying the foundations for continued activity. We hope to increase the number of signatories and members, and will continue to promote Mind Matters International via appropriate routes, for example, via the International Veterinary Regulators Network.

To-date our activities have largely been during the pandemic and so an online format was used, which was very effective given the target audience. However, it's clear that there is much to be gained from in-person discussion and interaction, too, so we are looking at the possibility of a hybrid event towards the end of 2023/early 2024, which will comprise online and in-person elements over a period of weeks.

Protect case study 4: Outreach and engagement in 2022

Where did we start?

Outreach and engagement have always been an important part of MMI's activities. But following two years of Covid-19, we recognised that we had lost out on many opportunities to engage with the veterinary community in-person. Moving much of our work online had helped us to increase reach and improve accessibility, but we wanted to ensure we were still having valuable conversations face-to-face.

What did we do?

For 2022 we developed a new Outreach and Engagement Plan and embarked upon a busy schedule that saw us visit colleges, universities and practices across the UK. We particularly

focused on going out across the UK to see vet students, student veterinary nurses, and new registrants. A summary of our recent outreach is below:

What was the impact?

2022 was our busiest year yet for attending in-person outreach events and saw members from the MMI team attend Freshers Fairs/Welcome Weeks at each university offering accredited degrees. We estimate we had face-to-face contact with just over 1,500 individuals through practice talks, lunch and learns and events across all parts of the UK. Through this engagement we were able to drive traffic to our website and events, learn more about what our audience wanted from us, and get feedback about how MMI was perceived by the professions.

Event	Online	In-person	Topic	Number of people
Human factors conference panel	Yes	-	Humanity of the vet profession	100
Askham Bryan College VN conference	Yes	-	MMI overview	80
BSAVA kite talks	-	Yes	Kite overview x 3	20
BSAVA	-	Yes	Neurodiversity talk	30 (plus online)
BSAVA	-	Yes	Campfires x3	50
College of Animal Welfare talk	Yes	-	MMI overview	50
XLvets	-	Yes	MMI overview	60
BVA lunch and learn	Yes	-	MMI overview	80
Surrey Uni final year panel	-	Yes	Final year and entering industry	100
Askham Bryan College staff briefing	Yes	-	MMI overview	5
BSAVA Student Congress	Yes	-	MMI overview	50+
Sparsholt College	Yes	-	MMI overview	50
Liverpool Vet school	-	Yes	Freshers fayre	200
Australian vet nurse network	Yes	-	MMI overview for VNs	50
Bristol Vet School	-	Yes	Freshers talk	200
Aberystwyth Vet School	-	Yes	Freshers talk	80
Royal Veterinary College (RVC)	-	Yes	Freshers fayre	270
Nottingham Vet School	-	Yes	Freshers talk	180
Cambridge Vet School	-	Yes	Freshers talk	80
Duchy College	Yes	-	MMI Overview	40

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What did we learn?

We have had excellent feedback on our work, along with many suggestions of topics we can focus on in future. While many of those we spoke to were already aware of MMI, we learned we have more work to do to raise awareness of what we have to offer—particularly among students in the early years of their studies. We know it is important to reach these groups – students experience specific stressors including exams, study demands, and extra-mural studies (EMS) placements. In-person talks and attendance at student events is a great way to build trust and understanding of the role MMI plays, and its context within the RCVS.

What's next?

We will build upon the momentum of 2022 by continuing to seek out opportunities for outreach throughout 2023 and beyond. We will aim to ensure we continue to reach as many veterinary and vet nursing students as possible, through creation of accessible content and attendance at Freshers Fairs and Welcome Weeks across the UK. Having made strides in building links with some harder to reach groups, we will expand upon our work with the rural community and look to replicate this success with other groups, including non-clinical members of the veterinary professions and vets in non-clinical roles.



Summary: Protect stream

We have delivered an ambitious programme of training, outreach and events through our protect stream, which has grown year-on-year. We have responded to the high levels of demand by expanding our training from core mental health awareness to a whole suite of topics that are relevant to the wellbeing of the veterinary professions. As our reach and impact have grown, we have remained mindful that we must seek to engage widely. We are thankful for our core base of engaged supporters, but

know we need to hear from other voices – particularly from sectors of the veterinary community who may be harder to reach, including those who find it difficult to attend in-person event. We have made great strides in our work with rural vets, students and vet nurses, and have grown MMI International considerably since its launch. Our five-year strategy outlines how we will deliver our protect stream in years to come, as we increase our reach and ensure MMI is there for everyone who needs us.

We have learned...	It matters because...	So our five-year plan outlines our commitment to:
...that much of our interaction with the professions is still with the same highly engaged and supportive individuals.	...we need to actively seek out new voices, while showing our continued appreciation for our core supporters.	Lesser heard voices
...that veterinary and vet nursing students often don't hear about MMI until they are nearing the end of their studies, or even later.	...they tell us they wish they had known about us sooner as they would have valued both the resources and training opportunities.	
...the veterinary community values our wide range of training, resources and guidance. Their feedback tells us that they trust us to deliver these in an evidence-based, safe and accessible way.	...training remains an integral part of MMI's activities. We will continue to offer a varied training programme, alongside resources and information on a wide range of topics.	Being a trusted source of accessible information
...the accessibility of our training and resources matters just as much as the content. Our audience has welcomed online training, the development of new online hubs and the introduction of new engagement activities (e.g. Campfires), but there are those who we are still not reaching – and these are often the groups who need us the most.	...MMI is for everyone, and we are committed to reaching all members of the veterinary community, including those who may face barriers in accessing what MMI has to offer. As we move into the next phase of MMI we will build upon the work we have done so far, and look at ways to ensure our content, resources, training and events are accessible, welcoming and inclusive for all.	

We have learned that, in order to deliver real impact, our protect stream needs to focus on increasing our reach.



Support:

As an initiative funded and hosted by a regulatory body, MMI is not able to offer direct, one-to-one support, as this could be seen as a conflict of interest. Instead, we deliver on our support workstream by supporting and promoting the work of specialist organisations who are well placed to deliver this kind of service. Together, we work towards a shared vision for a veterinary community where everyone has somewhere to turn in times of need.

How we delivered

Aim 1: Somewhere to turn

Support case study 1:
Vetlife

Where did we start?

We are committed to providing financial assistance to the organisations who are able to support vets and nurses when they need it. Our main beneficiary is Vetlife, which runs the Vetlife Helpline, an independent, confidential and free source of help for everyone in the veterinary community, including veterinary nurses, students and non-clinical staff. We also financially support Vetlife Health Support, which provides clinical mental health support for those in need. Our financial support of Vetlife pre-dates Mind Matters, but was moved under the initiative's umbrella at its inception.

What did we do?

We provide Vetlife Health Support with £100K per year and support its Vetlife Helpline through paying for training and their call-answering service. In 2020, we made an additional £20,000 donation in recognition of increased demand for Vetlife services during Covid-19. In 2022, we had given a total of £1million in donations to Vetlife since our annual financial support programme for the charity began.

What was the impact?

In 2022, Vetlife saw increased demand from the previous year. The service provided individual support to 3,503 helpline callers, up 3.3% from 2021. Demand for its Health Support service also increased, with a 15.5% increase in referrals during 2022, through which they were able to provide assessment, referral and treatment to members of the veterinary community experiencing distress.



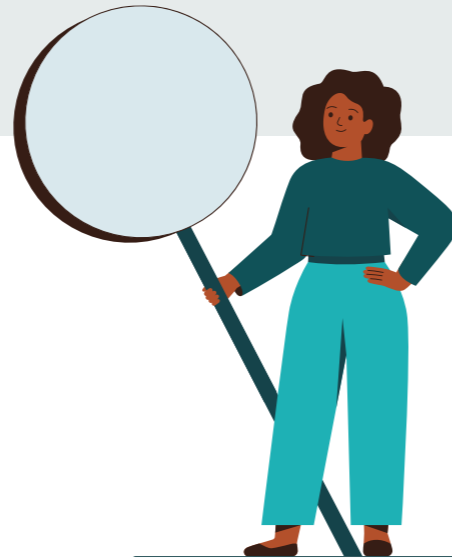
What did we learn?

The provision of 24-hour support from a service that understands the veterinary context is invaluable. The high regard for Vetlife within the professions, recognition of the quality of care they provide, along with increasing levels of help-seeking, are all to be celebrated. Within this context, demand on Vetlife's services increase year-on-year, and also reflects ongoing challenges both within the veterinary professions and beyond. These include workforce pressures, cost-of-living, and the ongoing impact of Covid-19. While we acknowledge industry, government, third sector and NHS approaches to mental health, we recognise that people must continue to have somewhere to turn in the meantime.

What's next?

We are grateful for the vital support Vetlife provides the veterinary community. We will continue to support and promote their lifesaving work.

Support case study 2:
Vet Support and ProfCon Investigation Support



Where did we start?

Back in 2016, we were approached by a group of veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses in Northern Ireland who wanted to launch a new support service for the veterinary community. The proposal was for a non-judgemental listening service that would differ from what was available via Vetlife in that, while confidential, it would not be an anonymous service, but one where a relationship could be built with an individual supporter over time. It was felt that this would be particularly useful in the NI veterinary sector, which was tightly knit and community-driven.

The group had carried out an initial survey into the need for the service, which showed that it would be well received. They requested initial seed funding from Mind Matters for recruitment and training of volunteers, marketing of the service, including a website and branding, and ongoing training and supervision of the volunteers to ensure they were working in an emotionally healthy way.

What did we do?

We agreed that there appeared to be a need, and supported the foundation of the service, which became known as Vet Support NI.

What was the impact?

Vet Support NI has been well used and the success has been such that the service is now available in Scotland and The Republic of Ireland via vetsupport.me. Mind Matters continues to fund the training and regular supervision sessions for the supporters.

What did we learn?

Based on the success of the service, when a need was identified, through our research into the impact of the RCVS complaints process on the mental health of veterinary

professions, for a 'buddying' service to support those going through our investigation process, we turned to Vet Support to help.

Following comprehensive training, the Vet Support team are now able to offer a confidential, non-judgemental listening ear to those going through the College's Professional Conduct (ProfCon) process. This is marketed as ProfCon Investigation Support and individuals are signposted to it as part of the communications that come from the Professional Conduct team. To date, only a handful of people have used the service, which was launched in 2021, and more work needs to be done to communicate it to those in need, while being mindful that at a point of stress in their lives, they may not always be open to digesting large amounts of information, even if it's about services that are there to be supportive.

Other activities that have been carried out, and changes made, to address the findings of the research into the impact of the College's process on mental health can be read in the action plan we produced in response to the report.

What's next?

We need to continue to support both the ProfCon Investigation Support service and the wider VetSupport service, as they provide a valuable alternative to the anonymous services that are also available.

Summary: Support stream

Recent years have seen unprecedented demand for services delivering direct support. Under our support stream, we have been proud to collaborate with such services, and to offer our support to these organisations, so that they, in turn, can be there to support others. We are committed to continuing our support of services such as Vetlife, Vet Support and ProfCon Investigation Support, as times continue to be tough for the veterinary professions. We will also continue

working to understand and address veterinary suicide, drawing on the growing evidence base while being brave enough to try innovative approaches. Over the coming years we will also work to develop best practice and guidance on topics relating to veterinary safeguarding, self-harm and talking about suicide – to ensure those joining us in this space are equipped to do so safely. This will include ongoing review of MMI's own policies, including those on safeguarding, self-harm, and privacy.

We have learned...	It matters because...	So our five-year plan outlines our commitment to:
...that we must continue to support and promote the work of specialist services such as Vetlife.	...their work saves lives and has long-lasting impact on the mental health and wellbeing of the veterinary professions.	Hope for tomorrow; somewhere to turn right now
...that veterinary mental health and suicide are now spoken about much more widely than when we began in 2014.	...we are delighted that so many voices have joined us in talking about veterinary mental health. But it concerns us when these difficult topics are not discussed safely. We have also noticed concerning narratives around the inevitability of mental ill health in the veterinary professions. We must address this by sharing our expertise and guidance around best practice, and continuing the work we do to promote more hopeful narratives.	
...the future of veterinary mental health research is extremely promising.	...by supporting, encouraging and nurturing early career researchers, we can facilitate research that translates into real impact for the professions.	Research
...we need to guide our grant applicants on how to fully articulate the practical implications of their research projects.	...veterinary mental health research is most impactful when findings are relevant in practice as well as theory.	

Our support stream must draw on both innovation and the evidence base.

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Conclusions from the CEO

I am proud of all that the initiative has delivered over the last almost nine years. Since 2014, we have rolled out a substantial programme of events, training and campaigns, staying true to our initial goals while remaining responsive to the emerging needs within the veterinary professions, and reacting to significant events and trends such as the Covid-19 pandemic and workforce crisis. These are not challenges we face alone in the UK, and we now also have an international wing.

The case studies outlined in this report give a taste of how we have identified opportunities and problems, taken decisive steps to address them, and used our learning to inform our future work. The open, honest and reflective approach we've taken to all of MMI's work really matters. It means we've been able to take a critical view of what we do and its impact, make judgements on how best to focus our efforts, and recognise societal and cultural shifts and the impact that these have also had on the conversations around mental health. For example, wider conversations around bullying and civility, harassment, and the intersection of mental health with ethnic, disability-based and sexual and gender identity inequalities, have all fed directly into MMI's work.

As we move into the next phase of MMI's work, we will continue to take this approach for the ambitious plans we have for the next five years. To learn more about our future priorities, we invite you to look at our new five-year strategic plan and how it maps out our direction of travel over the coming years, along with the core values and overarching themes that will guide us along the way.

To echo Kate's words at the start of this evaluation report, none of these achievements would be possible were it not for the hard work, dedication and passion of all those former Chairs, MMI Taskforce members and RCVS staff who have contributed to it, including the MMI core team, as well as those from the communications and events teams.

We are also thankful to RCVS Council for its continued, generous financial support for both MMI and also Vetlife, which continues to receive an annual donation from the College, and to the representative organisations and individual members of the professions who continue to support and engage with our work.



“I am proud of all that the initiative has delivered over the last almost nine years”

MMI was a trail-blazing project when it started, and was not without its critics. It's so positive to see that mental health and wellbeing are now threaded into the day-to-day activity of the professions, whether that's at congresses and events, or within veterinary workplaces of all types. The values of compassion and equity and diversity are also now a key part of the College's strategy. This is reflected in our work to integrate the principles of Mind Matters into our core regulatory activities – for example, ProfCon Investigation Support, our new educational accreditation standards, and the Practice Standards Scheme.

It's been an exciting eight and a bit years, and with the new strategy, I know that MMI is going to continue to have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of the veterinary professions for years to come.

Lizzie Lockett
RCVS CEO





mind matters

The Mind Matters Initiative is run by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
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