

Vet Sustain - Impact Assessment

HUMAN BEHAVIOUR CHANGE
FOR LIFE

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Table of Contents

1. Overview	3
2. Creating an impact assessment framework	3
2.1 The process	3
3. Methodology	4
3.1 Review of data provided from Vet Sustain	4
3.2 Framework	5
3.3 Survey	9
3.3.1 Ethics	9
3.3.2 Survey distribution	9
3.3.3. Data analysis	10
3.4 Interviews	10
3.4.1 Ethics	10
3.4.2 Software	10
3.4.3. Analysis	11
4. Results	11
4.1 Review of Vet Sustain data	11
4.2 Survey results	12
4.2.1 Part 1. Demographic information	12
4.2.2 Part 2. Understanding and awareness	16
4.2.3 Part 3. Actions and behaviours	19
4.2.4 Part 4. Outcomes and impact	22
4.3 Interviews	25
5. Discussion	35
5.1 Discussion of survey data	35
5.2 Discussion of interview data	36
5.3 Discussion overall	37
5.4 Consideration of the data in terms of theories and models	41
5.4.1 SWOT analysis from survey and interview data	41
5.4.2 Stage of Change Model	43
5.4.3 Processes of change	44
5.4.4 The COM-B model	46
5.4.5 APEASE criteria	48
5.4.6 Empowerment	49
5.4.7 Mechanism of impact	50
5.5 Limitations and recommendations	50
6. Conclusion	52
7. References	52
8. Supplementary material	53

1. Overview

Vet Sustain equips professionals working in the veterinary sector with the tools, training, a network, and advocacy they need to drive sustainability in their roles. This project evaluated Vet Sustain's impact on the UK veterinary sector in terms of the organisation's vision, mission, goals, and objectives. The project had three key components:

1. **Developing a framework** to assess Vet Sustain's impact.
2. **Conducting research** through a survey and interviews to gather data, then analysing the results using the framework.
3. **Interpreting the findings** through various models and theories to gain deeper insights and explore strategies for enhancing Vet Sustain's impact further.

A key challenge was in designing a framework that enabled the vision, mission and goals to be reported against in a way that change could be directly attributable to Vet Sustain. To this end, key performance indicators focussed on measuring factors including an increase in knowledge, empowerment, and advocacy. The survey provided interesting insights into how different stakeholders have engaged with Vet Sustain and their perception of the impact of that engagement on themselves as individuals, the groups and organisations they are part of, and the wider veterinary sector. The interviews enabled more 'colour' to be added through participants' case studies and reflections. The analysis of the data both against the framework and also through several models and tools enabled insight to be synthesised to produce a greater understanding of the impact Vet Sustain is having as well as how changes can be built upon, barriers addressed, and opportunities leveraged to drive more change. A mechanism by which Vet Sustain is directly and indirectly driving change was also outlined.

The role Vet Sustain holds in the veterinary sector is clearly valued and respected. The vast majority of people who have engaged with Vet Sustain can see the potential for the organisation in driving paradigm shifts in the sector and are excited and keen to be a part of such efforts. The research shows that through their initiatives, Vet Sustain empowers veterinary professionals to integrate sustainable practices into their daily operations, fostering a profession-wide commitment to environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

2. Creating an impact assessment framework

2.1 The process

An impact assessment is a process used to evaluate the potential effects of a project, policy, or decision on various factors, such as the environment, society, economy, or health. It helps identify both positive and negative outcomes, ensuring that informed strategic decisions are made to mitigate adverse effects while enhancing beneficial ones. The goal is to produce a strategic evidence-based narrative that brings the inspirational and powerful work to life. The assessment of Vet Sustain's work involved data collection through a survey and interviews with several stakeholders. This resulting report will be used to inform strategic development of the work as well as to communicate Vet Sustain's impact with potential stakeholders and funders.

When undertaking projects, programs, campaigns, or other initiatives, it is vital to have the ability to track their progress and measure their impact against set objectives and goals. This becomes particularly significant when aiming for large-scale or long-term behaviour change as is the case with Vet Sustain. Effective monitoring and evaluation practices can help organisations stay on track and within budgets, maintain motivation, and showcase progress at all stages of the project, rather than solely measuring success and impact at the end. It is about establishing the right processes to track progress and success along the way.

This impact study has involved some of the individuals and communities with whom Vet Sustain has interacted. This fosters further engagement and can accelerate success by celebrating progress and achievements throughout the project duration.

The process that was used for this impact study is summarised in the diagram below.



Diagram 1: The project process

Initially, Vet Sustain shared relevant data and strategic documents with HBCL. Following this, a survey was developed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data aligned with Vet Sustain's objectives. The survey was distributed to individuals engaged with Vet Sustain, including employees, course participants, veterinary practices, directors, and partners. The collected survey data was analysed to inform subsequent interviews, which aimed to delve deeper into emerging themes and provide additional examples and case studies. Although the formal processing of in-depth interviews would have exceeded the allocated budget, we conducted journalistic-style interviews, identifying key responses and themes during the conversation and from the recorded transcripts. These were analysed using content analysis and summarized for clarity. Data from all sources were then synthesized and analysed to construct a narrative on the project's impact.

Note that the project plan was submitted to the HBCL Ethical Review Board, which included both HBCL team members (who were not part of the research team) and an external participant (Vet Sustain Education Lead) with relevant knowledge for the project. Ethical considerations such as data protection, data sharing and consent were carefully outlined, with detailed descriptions of the mitigation measures in place to address each concern. The code for this ethical review process was HBCL005VS. The research was conducted in accordance with the relevant principles (those referring to medical research are not relevant to this study) embodied in the Declaration of Helsinki for example the principles regarding respect for individuals and the right to make informed decisions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Review of data provided from Vet Sustain

The increasing recognition that veterinarians and vet practices need to improve the sustainability of their work has been highlighted in two recent papers (Mair, Janska and Higham, 2021 and Higham et al., 2023) and Vet Sustain published an impact update in 2024 (Vet Sustain, 2024). These resources will be included in this impact study.

3.2 Framework

A framework is needed to enable progress to be mapped against Vet Sustain's strategy. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are quantitative measurements that help businesses track their progress and growth. The table below shows how each element of Vet Sustain's vision, mission, goals and objectives can be measured and how (Table 1). It must be noted, however, that attributing desired outcomes to KPIs is challenging when measuring wide or complex goals, as multiple factors and stakeholders influence results. This makes it difficult to isolate the impact of specific actions, leading to potential oversimplification or misleading conclusions. Combining quantitative and qualitative measures can help provide a more accurate picture while accounting for external influences and the survey and interviews in the research element of this project do help in adding colour and context to the elements outlined in the table below.

Table 1: Strategic elements, what to measure and how.

Element	What to measure	How to measure
Vision: Our vision is for the veterinary professions to be enabled as leading forces for sustainability.	Measure how Vet Sustain activities are enabling vet professionals (e.g., increased capacity in terms of knowledge, confidence, opportunity etc).	KPIs: increased scores for e.g., knowledge, confidence, action, plans and attitude.
	Are people engaging with Vet Sustain leading forces or becoming leading forces? Are they spreading the word and taking opportunities to lead?	KPIs: do respondents believe Vet Sustain is having a ripple effect?
Mission: Our mission is to enable and inspire veterinary professionals to continually improve the health and wellbeing of animals, people and the environment.	Measure how Vet Sustain activities are enabling vet professionals (e.g., increased capacity in terms of knowledge, confidence, opportunity etc).	KPIs: increased scores for e.g., knowledge, confidence, action, plans and attitude.
	Measure if Vet Sustain activities are inspiring vet professionals in the sustainability field. Are they motivated to learn more?	KPIs: measure number of respondents mentioning Vet Sustain as a source of inspiration.
	Measure how engagement with Vet Sustain enables veterinary professionals to continually improve health and well-being through perceptions.	KPIs: measure through case study analysis.
Goals: 1. Diverse and abundant wildlife 2. A good life for animals 3. Net zero warming	Measure across all goals by e.g., asking which areas people feel strongly about, by measuring knowledge and confidence in each goal topic, by measuring actions taken against each goal topic.	KPIs: For each goal – data from survey and interviews: - Increased knowledge of goal

<p>4. Health and happiness 5. A no-waste society 6. Enough clean water for all</p>		<p>- increased confidence in talking about it - Increased confidence in advocating for it.</p> <p>Specific KPIs could include actual actions towards each goal.</p>
<p>Objectives: 1. To build an online network of 5,000 veterinary professionals by 2020</p>	<p>Vet Sustain to estimate how many people are in their online network.</p>	<p>KPIs: For each objective use data from survey and interviews to show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased number of people in network - number of vet schools with sustainability integrated into the curriculum. - Number of, and increase in, vet practices who have integrated sustainability principles and practices.
<p>2. To promote and support the integration of sustainability topics into the curriculum of all UK veterinary schools by 2022.</p>	<p>Gain information about how well this objective is being met through interviews with the curriculum working group and people involved in academia. Keep records of which vet schools include sustainability topics in the curriculum and which do not.</p>	
<p>3. To promote and support the integration of sustainability into the policy and standards of the key UK veterinary associations and institutions by 2025</p>	<p>Gain information about how well this objective is being met through interviews with people involved in these associations and institutions through case studies.</p>	
<p>4. To promote and support the integration of sustainability policy and practices in to >50% of UK veterinary practices by 2025</p>	<p>Vet Sustain to estimate and report on this.</p>	
<p>5. To equip veterinary professionals and vet-led businesses with the tools to support uptake of sustainability policy and practices in the sectors we influence through the animals under our care, by 2025</p>	<p>Gain information about how well this objective is being met through the survey and interviews with people who have engaged with Vet Sustain.</p>	

Vet Sustain frame their activities under the strategic approaches of enablement (through the development of tools and training) and inspiration (through communication and advocacy). Although these are ongoing, impact can be measured by considering if the activities are taking place as planned and what effect these activities are having. This is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Linking the strategic approaches to activities and what can be measured regarding impact against each.

Strategic approach	Activity	What to measure using survey and interview approach
Enablement through the development of tools and training	<p>To generate toolkits and reference materials, based upon peer-reviewed and current science where it exists, to enable members of the professions and vet-led team to adopt sustainability principles and practices in their working lives and support the sectors we influence in a transition to sustainable animal care.</p> <p>To create a veterinary curriculum guide to enable UK veterinary schools to align in incorporating sustainability topics into their curricula.</p>	<p>Have tools been generated to the standards described?</p> <p>Does feedback suggest that the resources enable the user to adopt sustainability principles and practices?</p>
Enablement through training	<p>To educate veterinary professionals via a regular webinar series, events and training courses featuring network members and external thought-leaders and experts on sustainability topics [NB. online training will be prioritised to limit environmental impacts and maximise participation].</p>	<p>Have regular webinar series, events and training courses taken place?</p> <p>Do users report enablement through training to apply sustainability principles and practices?</p>
Inspiration through communication	<p>To engage veterinary professionals, members of the veterinary team and interested individuals through a regular email newsletter, blogs and articles, case studies and stories from the professions;</p> <p>To generate discussion, and motivate and celebrate positive action amongst veterinary professionals through a Facebook group 'Veterinary Sustainability Forum', highlighting emerging topics, events and initiatives;</p> <p>To boost the visibility of the veterinary professions as agents of sustainability via a public Facebook page.</p>	<p>Have the newsletter, blogs, articles, case studies and stories been produced?</p> <p>Have readers been inspired through the production of these materials?</p> <p>Do the materials generate discussion through the Facebook group mentioned?</p> <p>Does feedback show that the public Facebook page boost the visibility of how vet professionals can drive</p>

		sustainability in the veterinary sector?
Inspiration through advocacy	<p>To advocate veterinary leadership in sustainability issues, for example by launching awareness campaigns;</p> <p>To advocate policy uptake and local action in the professions via Vet Sustain directors, Working Group members and a Champions network.</p>	<p>Has Vet Sustain advocated veterinary leadership in sustainability through campaigns?</p> <p>Does feedback show that the directors, working group members and champions advocate policy uptake and local action?</p>

Domains of change: It can be useful to consider alternative ways of showing the impact of a project (a bit like a differential diagnosis!). Another way of thinking about impact is thinking about ‘domains of change’ or themes under which change is sought. The following domains of change were considered throughout the project:

- Supporting interested veterinary professionals and allied professionals to make changes in their workplace, and through the links and networks their role reaches.
- Providing opportunities for veterinary professionals to develop their skills and knowledge to enable them to be effective champions and advocates for sustainability
- Building a strong business case for change, with a compelling argument for the economic and social elements driving these changes.
- Communicating in a manner that is evidence-based, compelling, and compassionate, while effectively conveying the urgency and seriousness of sustainability issues.
- Creating a sense of community, so that people with disinterested practices/management feel less alone and have increased confidence in pursuing sustainability goals (even if they didn't learn actual sustainability concepts and practices from Vet Sustain).

The following questions were also considered as part of the impact evaluation process:

- Satisfaction: are people happy with what they have learnt, or how they have engaged with, with Vet Sustain?
- Learning, knowledge: are people learning new information or does the content of the courses and interactions reinforce what they already know?
- Behaviour change: are people and organisations making actual changes or is the impact more about people becoming engaged with the subject area and enjoying the connection, networks and learning?
- Organisational development: are Vet Sustain listening to feedback? How do people who interact with them feel the organisation could develop? What could be improved?
- Niche/role of Vet Sustain: are other companies doing the same as Vet Sustain, what is Vet Sustain's niche in the sector?

These themes and questions were shown to be relevant and key regarding assessing impact after the analysis of the surveys and interviews.

3.3 Survey

An online survey was developed (the full survey can be seen in supplementary material as a PDF document available on request). The survey comprised 23 questions, including both open-ended and closed questions, across five sections: Demographics and context; Understanding and awareness; Actions and behaviour; Outcomes and Impact; and Experience and satisfaction.

The demographics questions asked about the respondent's role in the sector, and species involved with professionally. The context questions explored the respondent's type of engagement with Vet Sustain, the length of engagement, how important sustainability is to the respondent, and the areas of sustainability the participant was interested in. These questions were designed to identify what categories of stakeholder the participants were in and some basic contextual information.

The second section, 'understanding and awareness', consisted of five questions exploring the participants' general perceptions of Vet Sustain and the messaging used, how the participants' understanding and confidence in sustainability knowledge has changed since engagement with Vet Sustain. These questions were designed to enable the KPIs associated with changes in perception, understanding, knowledge and confidence to be reported and to allow inference regarding changes in empowerment and enablement.

The third section, 'actions and behaviour', consisted of six questions aimed to find out what specific actions and behaviours are changing as a result of engagement with Vet Sustain. Questions related to changes in policies and actions at the level of the individual, practice, organisation or profession and included an exploration of the role Vet Sustain had in those changes being made and explored some of the barriers to change. These questions were designed to provide tangible examples of change and Vet Sustain's role in those changes happening. This section also aimed to determine what further steps could be taken by Vet Sustain to enable more actions to be taken.

The fourth section, 'outcomes and impacts', consisted of three questions, exploring the participants' perception of the impact of Vet Sustain on changes they have made or that have been made more widely in the sector. This section aimed to address challenges in attribution regarding what changes can be directly linked to Vet Sustain compared with other organisations working to facilitate or deliver change.

Finally, the fifth section, 'experience and satisfaction', consisted of two questions exploring what elements of engagement the participant had found most useful and what could be improved. The survey ended with the participant being asked to provide any further reflections and their email address should they be open to being invited for interview to discuss this topic in more depth.

3.3.1 Ethics

Before completing the survey, all respondents were informed about the purpose and content of the study, their rights to anonymity and data protection, including data storage and disposal following the end of the study, and their freedom to withdraw at any point. Respondents were asked for their informed consent via a forced-choice response.

3.3.2 Survey distribution

The survey was created and hosted on Survey Monkey and was live from 2nd December 2024 to 13th January 2025. Survey Monkey was chosen as a platform due to the researcher's familiarity with the platform and its capacity to design and host surveys. Respondents were recruited via snowball sampling, as the survey was promoted on social media, through Vet Sustain's networks. Respondents

were initially recruited via Facebook posts, emails, and personal communications from Vet Sustain and the research team. Details of the survey were then also shared by third parties to these initial recruitment activities. There was no incentive to take part for participants; it is recognised that there is a potential for a biased sample due to people who are interested in the topic and who have engaged with Vet Sustain being more likely to participate than those who have no interest. The settings in Survey Monkey were used to not allow multiple responses from the same IP address to safeguard against people completing the survey more than once although they could have done so through using different devices. The only restriction regarding participation was for participants to be over the age of 18.

3.3.3. Data analysis

The survey produced both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were analysed using Microsoft Excel 365. Qualitative analyses were performed on the free-text responses, identifying and quantifying the themes. The results were entered into the evaluation framework for the results and discussion sections.

3.4 Interviews

Interviews were conducted to explore key emerging themes in greater detail. It was determined that twelve interviews would take place, with three participants selected from each of the following four categories: corporate partners, veterinary institutes and/or associations, course participants, and working group members. The final question in the survey asked participants if they would be open to being contacted for a potential interview and if they had any final comments. From those who expressed interest in being interviewed and provided their email addresses, participants were selected to meet the target of twelve. Any gaps in representation were filled using Vet Sustain's network. Participants were chosen solely based on their willingness to be interviewed and their role with Vet Sustain, without regard to their responses to other survey questions.

A schedule of questions for the semi-structured, journalistic style interviews was drafted taking into account that each category of participants required a slightly different approach. The schedule included acquiring verbal consent and debriefing notes.

3.4.1 Ethics

Upon being invited for an interview, participants were informed that, if they remained willing to participate, they would receive briefing materials about the project along with a consent form to sign and return. Similar to the survey participants, all interviewees were briefed on the study's purpose and content, their rights to anonymity and data protection, including how data would be stored and disposed of after the study concluded, and their right to withdraw at any time. At the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded that the session would be recorded and transcribed, and that their consent would be obtained in advance if any of their quotes were to be used in the final write-up.

3.4.2 Software

Interviews were scheduled using Calendly (calendly.com), with a link sent to participants upon their agreement to be interviewed. They could then select a time slot from the available options. Calendly automatically added the scheduled time to both the interviewer's and interviewee's calendars, along with a MS Teams link for the interview. The interviews were transcribed using Teams' built-in transcription feature, and some were also summarized and recorded with the AI note-taking tool

Fathom (<https://fathom.video/>). During the interviews notes were taken manually by the interviewer in a MS Word file; responses of each interviewee were recorded in different colour texts under each question (or question-area as each question was tailored according to the category of interviewee).

3.4.3. Analysis

The notes made associated with each question were synthesised into a narrative and quotes from the transcripts were added for extra detail (see Results section). The results were entered into the evaluation framework for the results and discussion sections.

4. Results

4.1 Review of Vet Sustain data

Vet Sustain data reviewed for this impact assessment consisted of two papers (Mair, Janska & Higham, 2021 and Higham et al. 2023) and the Vet Sustain Impact Update 2024 (Vet Sustain, 2024).

Mair, Janska and Higham (2021) conducted a survey of 374 participants, of whom 75% were equine veterinary surgeons. Despite 77% of responses stating that sustainability was important to them, only 13% of those participants considered themselves to “feel knowledgeable/well-informed about practical ways of promoting sustainability in equine veterinary practice”. Only about 25% of practices had a “green group” to promote sustainable practices at work and less than 25% thought their practice was addressing sufficiently with fossil fuels, travel, disposable materials, responsible paper sources, water saving and communication of sustainability issues. However, 50% and upwards recognised that their practices were better at addressing the issues of paper-free management, antimicrobial stewardship, anthelmintic stewardship and drug disposal.

A second survey was conducted with the goal of finding out more about sustainability policies and practices in UK and ROI veterinary clinics and practices (Higham et al., 2023). There were 392 responses, with the majority stating that their practices had policies regarding medicine stewardship and animal welfare. Less well-represented were social well-being and client-advice regarding the environmental impacts of animal husbandry, with less than 40% of participants being aware of policies at their practices.

As outlined in the 2024 impact update (Vet Sustain, 2024), over the past five years, the organisation has engaged with more than 1,000 veterinary professionals through various initiatives, including workshops, webinars, and training sessions. These efforts have led to the development of more than 50 sustainability resources, such as guidelines, toolkits, and case studies, accessible to practitioners nationwide. Additionally, Vet Sustain's advocacy has influenced policy changes, with three major veterinary associations integrating sustainability into their strategic plans. The organization's online platforms have also seen substantial growth, with a 200% increase in website traffic and a 150% rise in social media engagement, reflecting a growing interest and commitment to sustainable practices within the veterinary community. Activities particularly highlighted in the 2024 report include:

- The Veterinary Carbon Calculator as a key achievement. By pinpointing emission hotspots, practices can implement targeted strategies to mitigate their environmental impact, fostering a culture of sustainability within the profession.
- The Carbon Literacy course tailored specifically for veterinary professionals. Since its inception in March 2023, nearly 100 participants from diverse sectors, ranging from small animal clinics to large-scale agricultural practices, have completed the program. This training equips

practitioners with the knowledge and motivation to reduce carbon emissions both within their organizations and in their broader communities, effectively bridging the gap between environmental awareness and actionable change.

- The Student Sustainability Guide, a resource designed to inspire and guide veterinary students in integrating sustainable practices during their academic journey and clinical placements. By engaging the next generation of veterinary professionals, Vet Sustain ensures that the principles of sustainability are ingrained from the outset of their careers, fostering a profession-wide commitment to environmental and social responsibility.
- Vet Sustain's role in promoting initiatives like the 2024 RUMA Antibiotic Amnesty. This campaign encourages veterinary practices to collect unused antibiotics from clients, ensuring their safe disposal and mitigating the risk of antimicrobial resistance. Such efforts underscore the organization's dedication to public health and the responsible use of medical resources.

As Vet Sustain reflected on its five-year journey, the impact of its initiatives is evident in the widespread adoption of sustainable practices across the veterinary profession. Through innovative tools, educational programs, and collaborative campaigns, Vet Sustain continues to lead the charge in transforming veterinary care for a sustainable future.

4.2 Survey results

The survey received 251 responses. A comparison of IP addresses suggested that all responses were unique and that those responses containing similar or identical IP addresses had sufficiently different answers to survey questions that they could be considered distinct. By the end of the first section (demographic information), there were 216 participants remaining. A total of 182 participants continued answering questions until the end of the survey, although not all answered the free-response questions.

4.2.1 Part 1. Demographic information

In response to **“What is your role and organisation type within the veterinary sector?”** the majority of participants who started the survey (75%) selected the option “Veterinary professional or member of the veterinary team”. Around half of these also selected at least one other option, in particular “Veterinary Practice” and “Teaching, research or academia” with some selecting most options. Of the 25% of participants who were not members of a veterinary team, nearly a quarter were involved with teaching, research or academia and the remainder were split between the various options. A small number of responses did not fall into any of our categories, for example giving answers such as “Business administrator”, “Waste management” or “Zoo”.

Figure 1 shows the split by species of services provided in response to **“For which group of animal species does your practice or organisation provide services or products, if relevant?”** Nearly half provided services for small animals. Two participants stated that they provided services for honeybees and zoo animals. Two additional participants in the “other” category stated, “All species other than farm animals” and “small animals, pigs and poultry”.

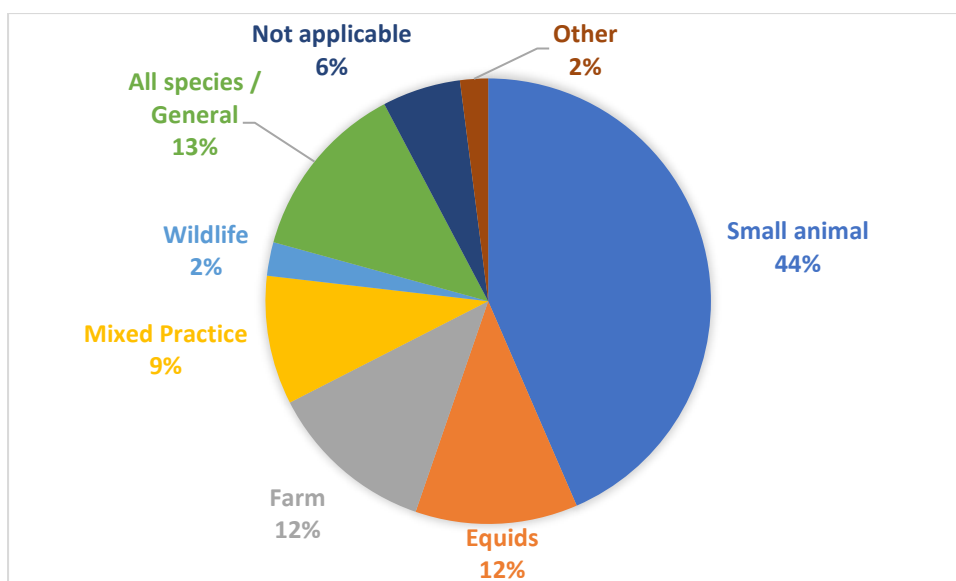


Figure 1. Species for which participants provided services.

Figure 2 shows the level of engagement that each participant had undertaken with Vet Sustain, in response to **“What best describes your interaction with Vet Sustain?”**. The majority of participants had had engagement with Vet Sustain prior to taking the survey; only 5% stated that the survey was their first engagement. The largest proportion (50%) engaged via social media and/or the Facebook group. 16% had undertaken courses or training with Vet Sustain and 12% were users of the Carbon calculator. 14% were members of the Vet Sustain Working Groups.

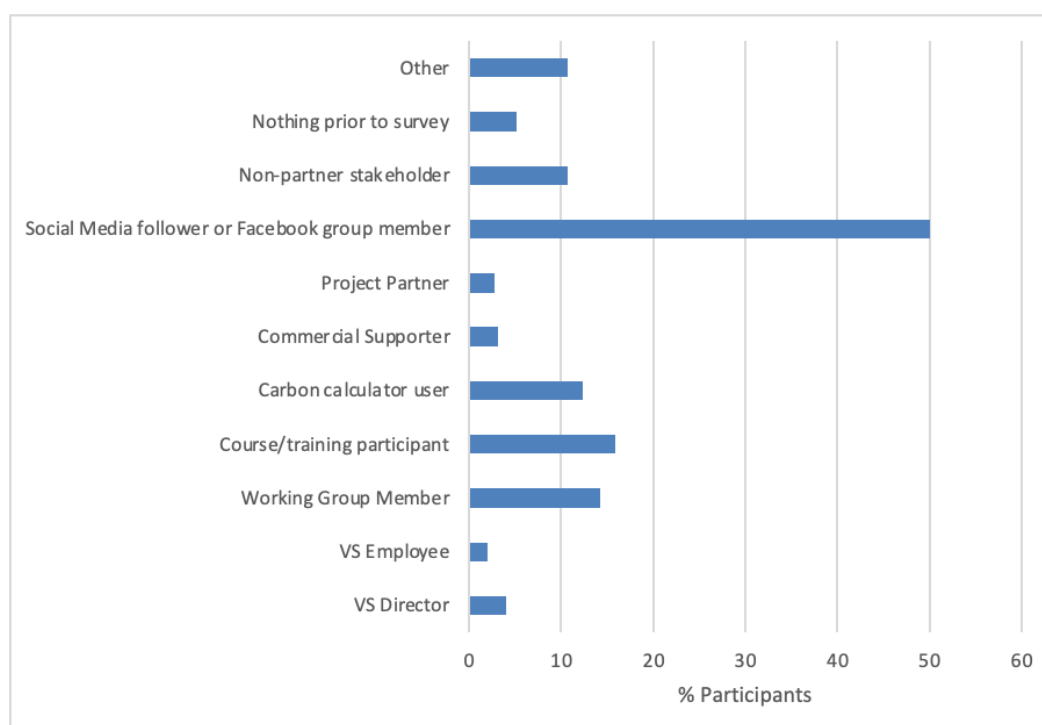


Figure 2. Level of engagement with Vet Sustain for each participant (totals add to more than 100% because participants selected multiple options).

Figure 3 shows the length of time for which participants had been engaged with Vet Sustain in response to the question **“How long ago was your main interaction with Vet Sustain?”**. There was a

relatively consistent distribution of participants across different durations of engagement, although recent engagement was slightly higher. The largest proportion showed that engagement with Vet Sustain was ongoing and for more than 7 months.

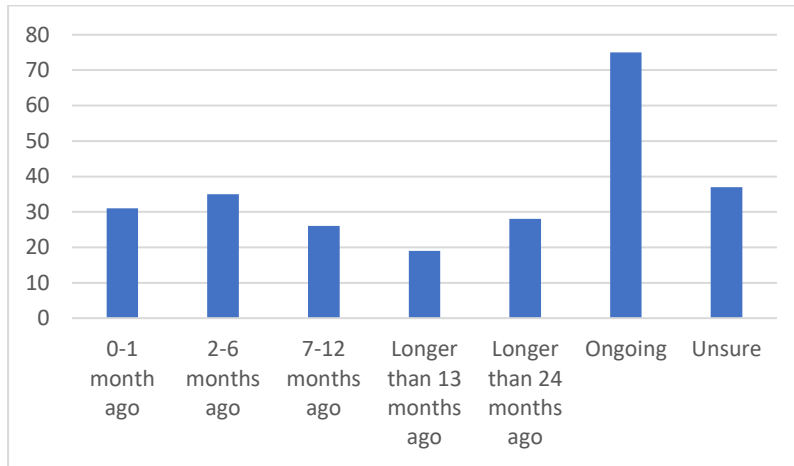


Figure 3. Duration of engagement with Vet Sustain.

Participants were next asked “**Is sustainability important to you?**” and the results are shown in Figure 4. Not unexpectedly, the vast majority said that it was indeed important, although one person said that it was not important. 65% said that sustainability has been important to them for a long time, compared with 26% who acknowledged that Vet Sustain has played a key part in raising their awareness of it in a veterinary context. Just 2% said that sustainability has meant much more to them since being involved with Vet Sustain.

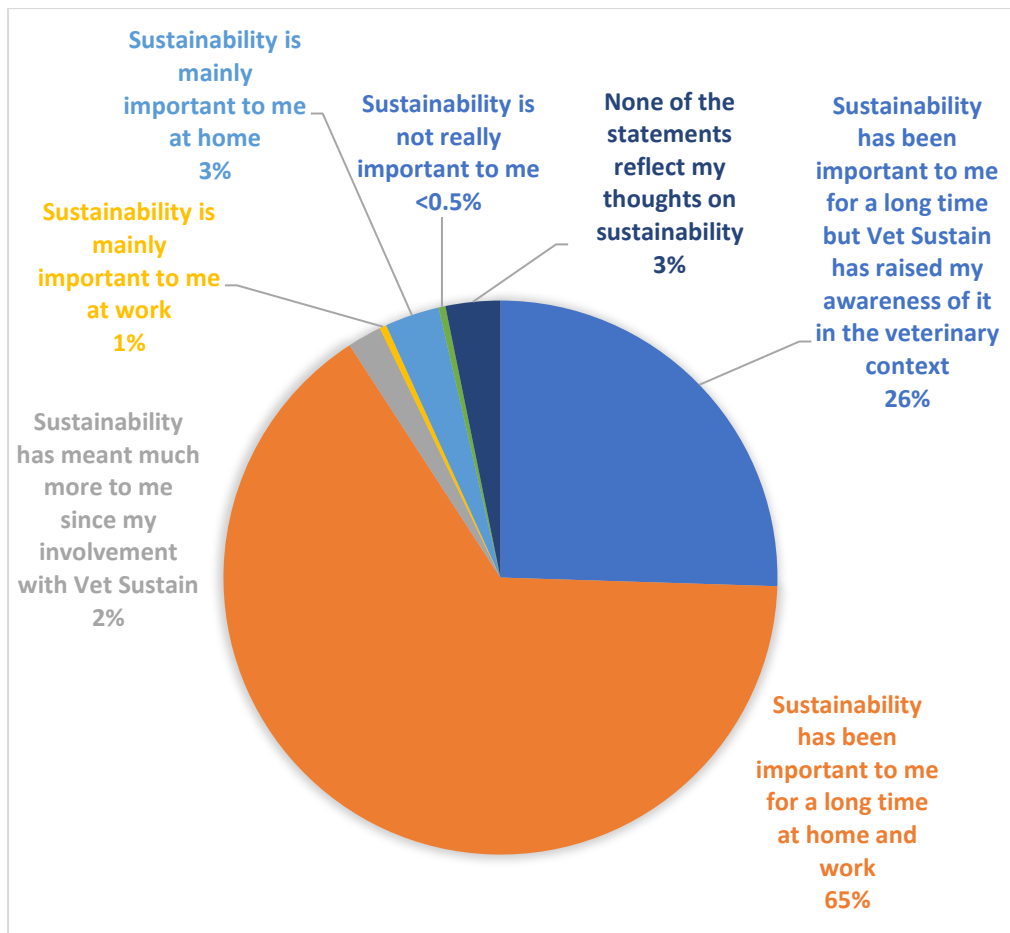


Figure 4. The importance of sustainability to participants

When asked which sustainability issues were most important, “**Which of the following areas of sustainability do you feel most strongly about?**” numbers of answers for each category remained fairly consistent as a lot of participants answered most of them (Figure 5). Of the 32 comments, 11 also reflected the view that they could not be distinguished and that all were important. Some participants selected all, others said in the comments that they wanted to choose all but forced themselves to select one. So, this data is perhaps not representative statistically but instead suggests a difficulty at being asked to pick an issue. An additional theme, featuring in five of the comments related to financial, economic or social sustainability.

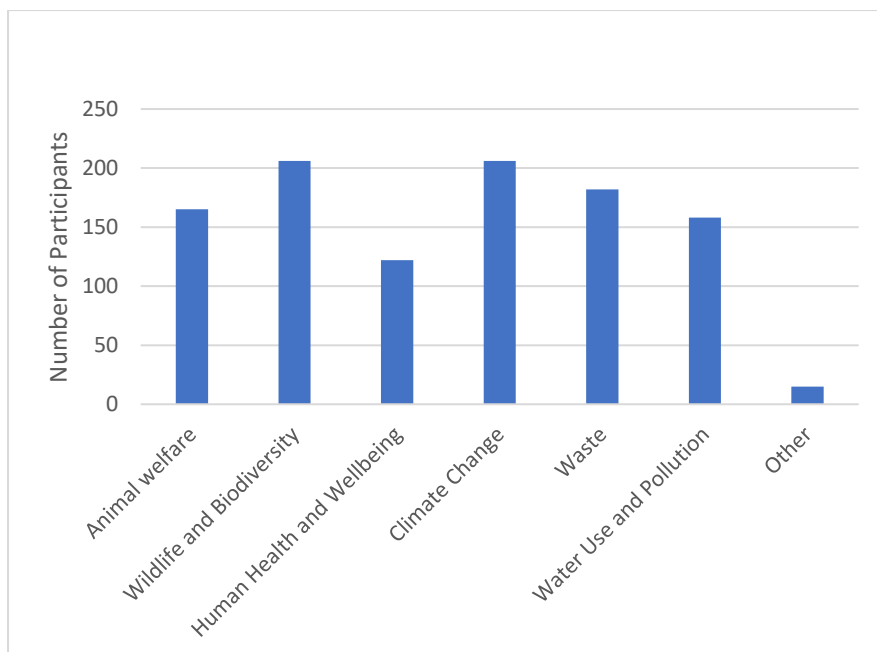


Figure 5. The relative importance of various sustainability issues.

4.2.2 Part 2. Understanding and awareness

The 210 responses to the free-text question “**When you read/hear Vet Sustain or see the logo what thoughts, phrases or words spring to mind?**” were overwhelmingly positive. About half conveyed thoughts about Vet Sustain and their associations with the organisation itself (for example “*positive*”, “*supportive*” or “*carbon calculator*”). About 60 responses focused on the messages conveyed by Vet Sustain (e.g. “*sustainability*”, “*environment*”, “*green*”, “*climate change*”). Many responses focussed on the perception of quality of those messages (e.g., “*solid, well researched*”, “*trustworthy, informed*”, “*accessible, gentle, welcoming*”). A smaller group of positive messages expressed gratitude towards Vet Sustain and relief that someone was prioritising this topic (e.g., “*I say THANK GOODNESS someone is doing this!!!*”). Some expressed affection for those involved and the work of the organisation (e.g., “*Good people trying to do good things*”; “*Sustainability. Climate change. Passionate. Committed*”, “*Positive impact on the veterinary profession*”). Some mentioned Vet Sustain’s resources or activities (e.g., “*Your website is so informative*”, “*source of information*”; “*working for the greater good of the profession and planet*”). Around 10% seemed confused, thinking, for example, it may have been a veterinary product or mental health support group, or stated that the name/logo did not really mean anything to them.



Figure 6. Word cloud of words and phrases prompted by the name Vet Sustain or its logo.

Figure 6 shows a word Cloud created from the answers to **“When you read/hear Vet Sustain or see the logo what thoughts, phrases or words spring to mind?”** The threshold for inclusion was set to 2 and the maximum count was 56 for “sustainability”. Meaningless words (e.g. “and”, “should”, “however”, “industry”, “plastics”, “sector” etc) were excluded.

A very small minority of comments were negative, suggesting that Vet Sustain was an echo chamber, political, BVA-focused, expensive and cashing in on sustainability theme, idealistic, evangelical or providing “*wishy washy*” advice. One participant said that the name/logo represented “*Guilt about how much we waste as a profession*” and contrary to the vast majority expressing that the information and resources are balanced and evidence based, one respondent said, “*evangelical spokespersons, lack of balance*”.

216 participants answered the next three questions about awareness, understanding and confidence to talk about sustainability:

- i) Before you heard about Vet Sustain, how informed were you of the challenges of sustainability and possible solutions in the veterinary sector?
- ii) How has your understanding of the challenges of sustainability in the veterinary sector changed because of your engagement with Vet Sustain?
- iii) After your engagement with Vet Sustain, how confident do you feel discussing sustainability in the veterinary sector with others?

The answers were very positive, showing high levels of awareness of sustainability issues (Figure 7). Although comments answering other questions suggest that awareness and behaviour changes took place independently of Vet Sustain, the responses here showed that 73 participants (34% of those who answered the question) moderately increased their understanding and 66 (31%) significantly increased their understanding, the two largest categories. The majority of participants (82%) also felt

confident or very confident in discussing sustainability in the veterinary sector following their engagement with Vet Sustain.

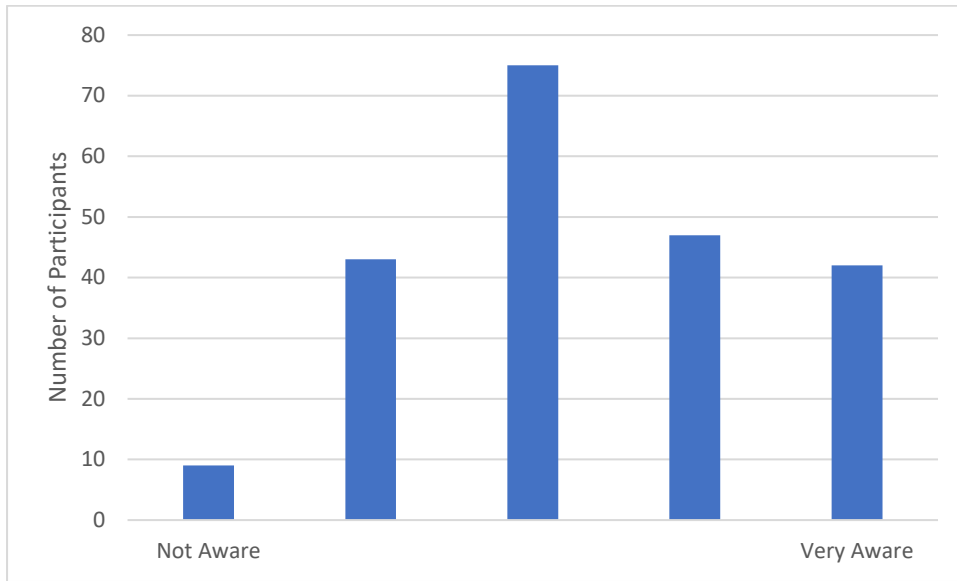


Figure 7i) Awareness of sustainability.

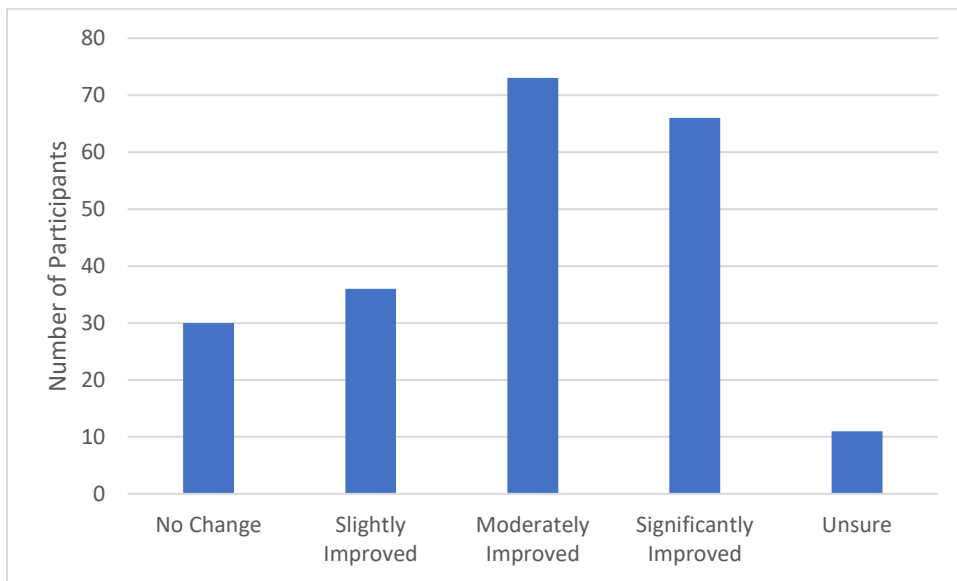


Figure 7ii) Understanding of challenges of sustainability in the veterinary sector as a result of engagement with Vet Sustain

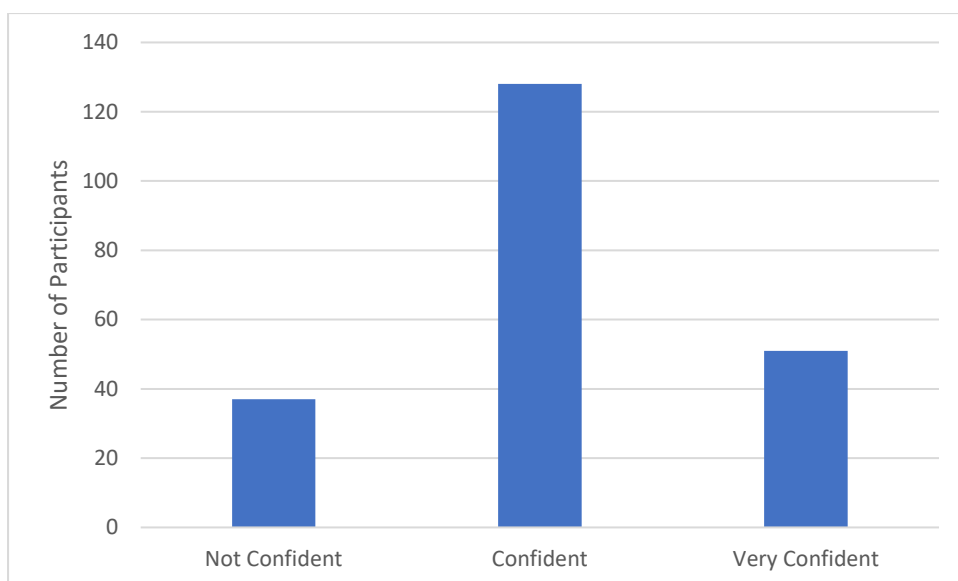


Figure 7iii) Confidence in discussing sustainability in the veterinary sector, following engagement with Vet Sustain

The next question asked for a free response to **“Please describe how you feel regarding the messaging promoted by Vet Sustain. Has Vet Sustain's messaging made you feel positive and inspired to do more, or unsure where to start?”**. It was answered by 207 participants and over 50% gave positive answers, saying that they were inspired to do more. Some relished the challenge or valued being part of a community of likeminded people. A handful said that they were inspired to do more but independently of Vet Sustain interventions. 14% said that they were inspired to do more but that they were challenged by various factors – examples included the size of the task, lack of interest from colleagues, challenges of working in a more corporate practice. Some were both inspired to do more and unsure where to start. Just 6% said that they felt unsure where to start (without also saying they were inspired to do more). Around 20% gave ambiguous answers and/or used the opportunity to offer opinions that were unrelated to the question. A minority were negative, for example objecting to Vet Sustain’s support of livestock farming and vegan pet food; others gave more constructive criticism, worrying that Vet Sustain had insufficient reach.

4.2.3 Part 3. Actions and behaviours

Participants were next asked about the changes they had made in their workplace as a result of engagement with Vet Sustain. 183 to 185 participants answered, depending on the category – Environmental, Antibiotic use and stewardship, Use of medicines for parasite control and Animal welfare. The question was phrased as **“Have you or your organisation implemented or improved any of the following policies or practices in your workplace as a result of your engagement with Vet Sustain? If ‘improved’ or ‘implemented’, please specify what you have done in the comments box.”** Figure 8 shows the responses – the impact of Vet Sustain engagement is particularly noticeable in the Environmental and Use of medicines for parasite control. Policies for Antibiotic use and Animal welfare were more likely to be already in place.

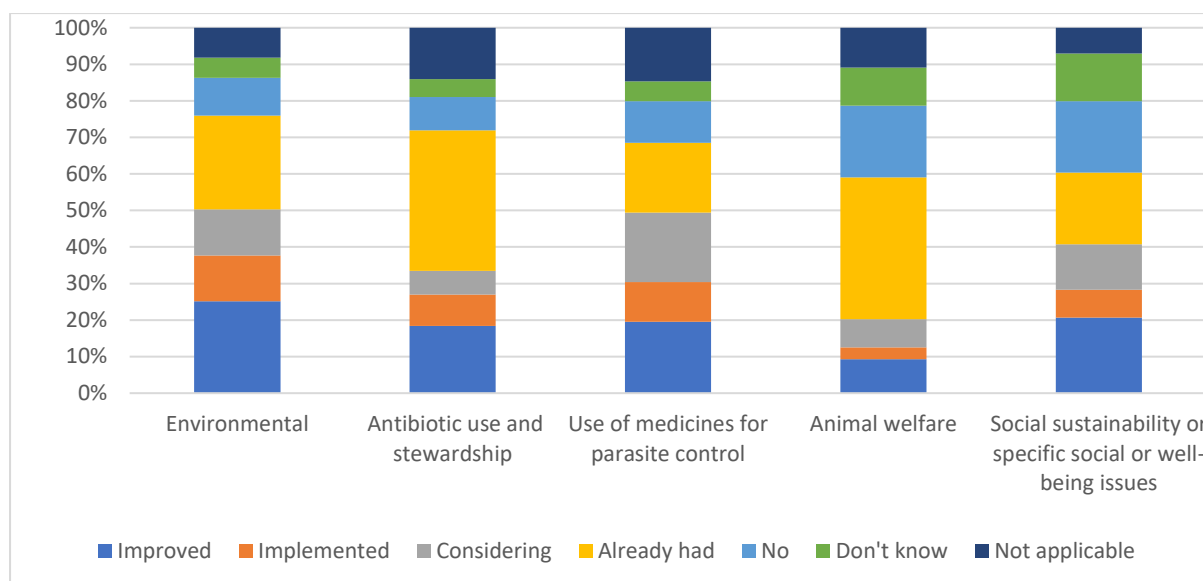


Figure 8. Policies implemented or changed as a result of engagement with Vet Sustain

There were 66 responses to the open question asking for details of actions that had been implemented or improved. Some responses made it clear where Vet Sustain had been a key influence, others stated that they had implemented sustainable policies independently of engagement with Vet Sustain (other organisations such as Investors in the Environment were mentioned), and others were ambiguous as to how much influence Vet Sustain had had. In the case of those where Vet Sustain had inspired change, examples of actions included use of the carbon calculator, greater consideration of antibiotics and medicine for parasite control, implementation of wellbeing teams, better waste management, reduction of single use items and improved recycling, and greener forms of travel.

By way of follow-up, participants were then asked to **“Please describe any other new actions you have taken”**. There were 128 responses to this question. Some were repeated answers they had given in the previous question, rather than focusing on *other* actions that had been taken – repeated examples included waste management, reduction of single use items and recycling. Use of the carbon calculator was mentioned in four cases, as was improved management of anaesthetic gas. A few again specified that they had made changes independently of Vet Sustain. Some were making more effort to speak to colleagues, share social media posts or speak at conferences about sustainability.

The next question delved further into any new actions that had been taken, and the role Vet Sustain had played; **“Thinking about any new actions you have taken, what was Vet Sustain’s role in enabling and inspiring those actions to be implemented, if any?”** There were 124 responses, the majority of which gave examples of ways in which Vet Sustain had provided support. Examples that were very specific included the carbon calculator, tool kits and education in the form of webinars, courses and conference talks. Alternative positive responses mentioned more general comments about having the support of Vet Sustain and the enhanced confidence it led to: *“I did the veterinary approach to sustainable food and farming certificate which gave me the confidence to discuss my ideas with the practice. It’s provided me a network of incredibly knowledgeable individuals to contact with questions and colleagues to discuss a subject that I love. It has also enabled me to join in discussions with regenerative farmers without feeling like a complete fraud. I often signpost colleagues to vet sustain webinars as well.”* Some people again mentioned that Vet Sustain had not been the main driver for change, although some were more constructive such as *“its [sic] difficult for me to know where VS fits*

here for me as these things are so part of my life. However, the contact with VS will certainly have been part of the teams I work with keeping abreast of current thinking and activities.”

In response to **“What could Vet Sustain have done to further facilitate the change?”**, 73 participants provided suggestions. Most were very specific suggestions including, for example more free webinars and content, leaflets for practices, resources for farmers, resources for New Zealand, more publicity, a to-do list, advice regarding use-by dates on medications and reusable surgical materials, more advice on landscape/gardens. Four participants said Vet Sustain should continue what is currently being done and a couple suggested that Vet Sustain is doing enough and that it is the responsibility of everyone to take it further.

The final two questions in this section looked at barriers to change: **“Are there any actions you intend to do, but something always seems to get in the way?”**. 91 participants answered the yes/no question with 45 saying “yes” and 46 saying “no”. The comments section was answered by 88 people and could be themed according to lack of time (38%), difficulty engaging colleagues/management (25%), financial considerations (13%) (although these numbers are approximate as some people listed multiple reasons). A further 19 responses were more individual and/or did not necessarily answer the question directly.

Participants were also asked for their opinion on some specific barriers to change and what would help them overcome them. **“Which of the following factors do you think would help change intentions into action?”** Multiple options could – and were often – selected but Figure 9 shows that “Clear Leadership, strategy and goals from senior management”, “Clear demonstration of the financial benefits to the practice of having an environmental policy”, “Standards, guidance and frameworks for practices to follow” and “Greater knowledge on sustainable solutions for veterinary practices” emerged as the most important selections. There were also 25 additional free-text comments. No real theme emerged although two people again highlighted that all of these are needed. A couple mentioned liE and the suggestion to work together (that point had come up in previous questions as well).

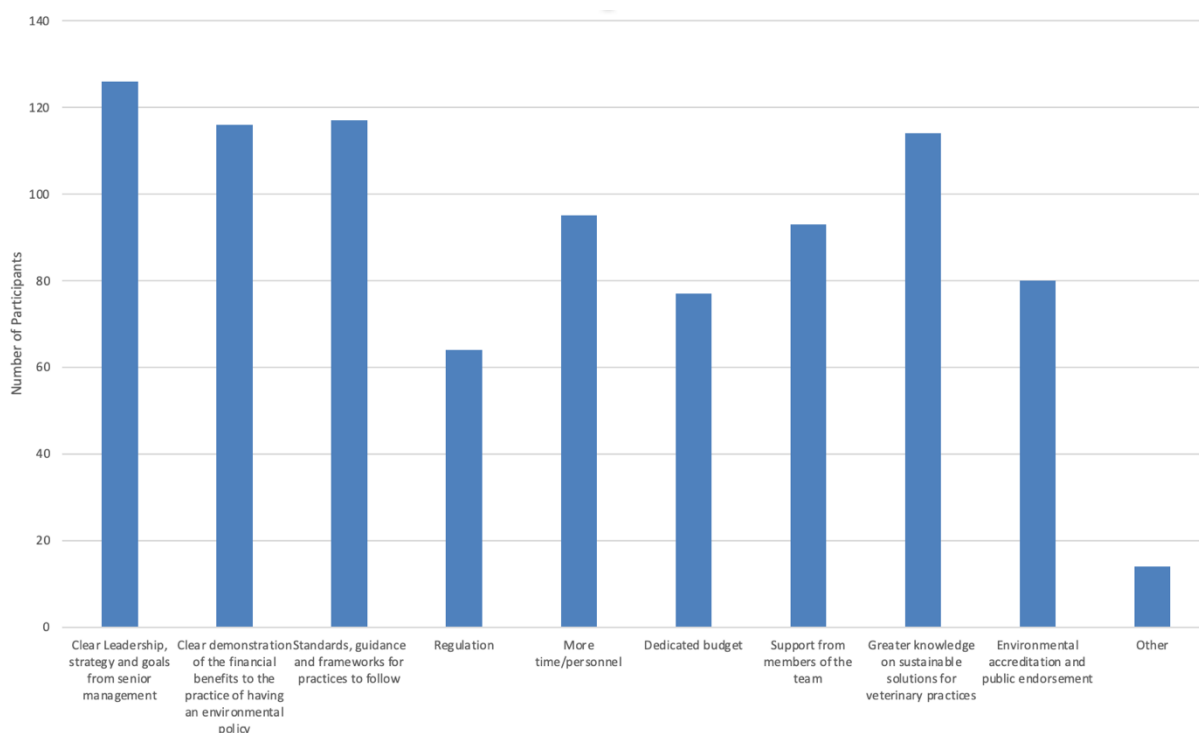


Figure 9. Barriers to change and their solutions.

4.2.4 Part 4. Outcomes and impact

By this stage in the survey there were still 182 people participating for the three short questions about the outcomes for sustainability and the impact of Vet Sustain on the veterinary sector. Over 75% answered “yes” to “**Do you feel that Vet Sustain has contributed to meaningful outcomes for sustainability in the vet sector?**” as shown in Figure 10i. A similar 74% agreed or strongly agreed, as shown in Figure 10ii, with the statement “**My engagement with Vet Sustain will have a lasting positive impact on my work or approach to sustainability.**” Only 6% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Finally, 55% answered “yes” to “**Has your involvement with Vet Sustain prompted you to take more action for the environment, animal welfare, or social wellbeing, at home, or in other areas of your life?**”, compared with 22% saying “no” and 23% being unsure (Figure 10iii). The follow up free-text comment option received 69 responses, the majority positive and gave various examples of changes they had made. Four of the more specific examples are listed below, showing the diverse range of changes:

“It has helped to connect with colleagues who are invested in sustainability that aren’t farm vets, so it widens my knowledge. I planted some orchard trees in the garden and a veg bed, signed up to my local organic veg box. I have joined another veterinary sustainability working group in the veterinary sector, which vet sustain gave me the confidence to do.”

“We were already achieving a lot however it made me push work colleagues to do the carbon literacy course”

“Gloves Awareness Campaign and Chemical Free Cleaning in work. Chemical free cleaning at home and sourcing more sustainable products/food at home. More awareness of my own carbon footprint.”

“Working on promoting antimicrobial stewardship, reduction in parasiticide use and reduction in theatre emissions especially anaesthetic gases, across the small animal sector”

Just eight respondents said they had been making the changes independently of Vet Sustain and only three had had no engagement.

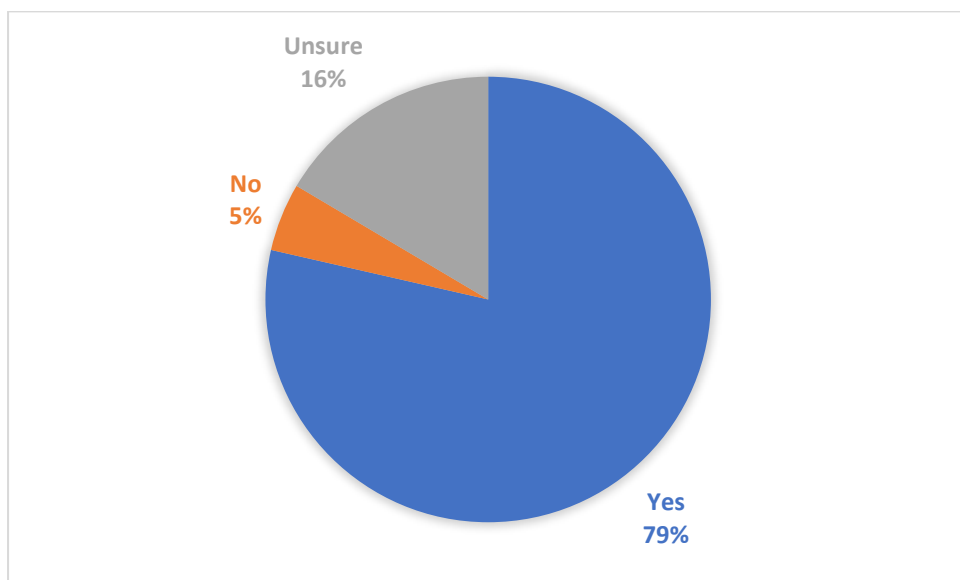


Figure 10i. The proportion of responses saying whether Vet Sustain contributed to meaningful outcomes.

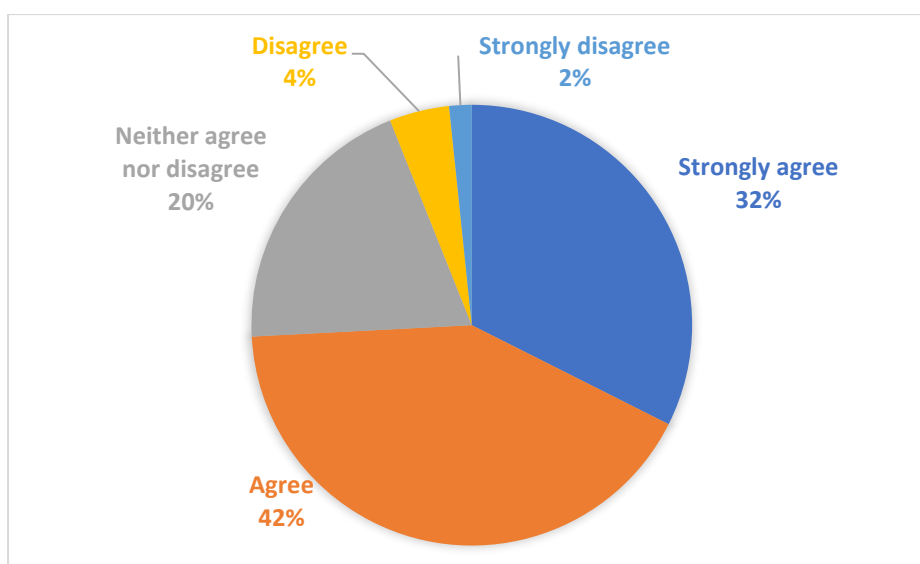


Figure 10ii. The proportion of responses agreeing that Vet Sustain will have a lasting positive impact on their work or approach to sustainability.

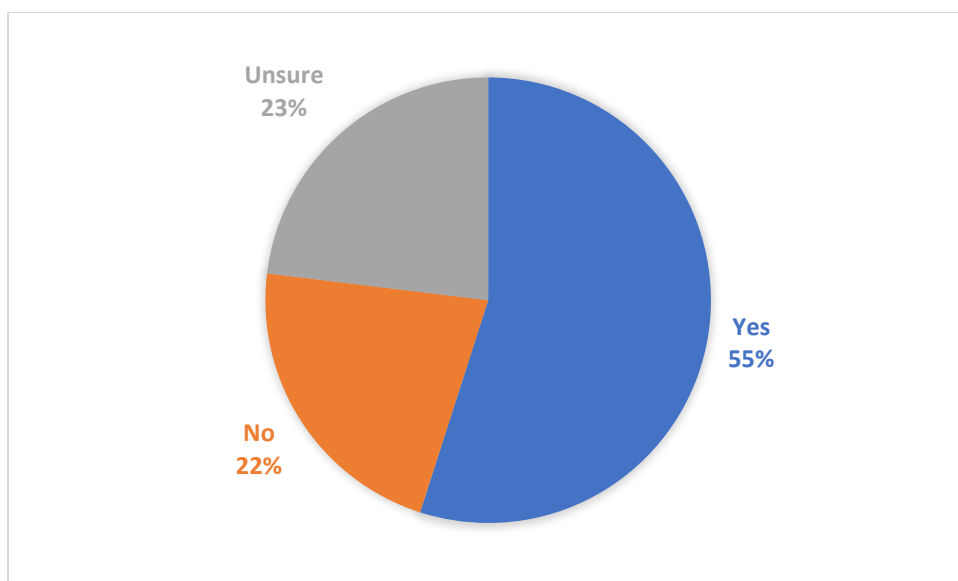


Figure 10iii. The proportions of participants saying whether their involvement with Vet Sustain prompted them to take more action for the environment, animal welfare, or social wellbeing.

The final questions then returned to free-text responses. 143 people answered, **“What aspects of the engagement did you find most valuable?”** and two clear themes emerged. Firstly, they appreciated finding a sense of community, knowing other people were out there and were doing similar things. This gave them networking opportunities and a source of encouragement. The second theme related more to the education delivered – Vet Sustain provided a valuable source of information via webinars, Working Groups, blog, social media, newsletter, courses, case studies, carbon calculator.

The final question, asking **“What could be improved in future engagements?”** received 101 positive responses, 88 of which were individual specific suggestions. Examples included journal discussions, a roadmap of Vet Sustain resources and a series of small project suggestions that would build change in manageable bite-sized chunks. One theme that emerged with 13 responses requested more of a community so that people did not feel that they were alone in their attempts to make change and engage colleagues. A smaller theme with five responses commented on the cost of engagements and requested more free resources, for example webinars. A further eight just requested that Vet Sustain continues to do more of the same because it is all good. Two participants repeated their previous comments about not supporting livestock-farming or vegan pet-food. One asked for more help to combat climate change deniers, of which it was suggested there were plenty within the vet sector.

Examples of positive comments that were given across the free text responses include: *“I love all you do and being voluntary please know how much it is so valued. Vet sustain gives me hope for a brighter future that I know the veterinary sector can lead in.”*; *“Such a joy to see this organisation grow in the way it has. One thing very obvious to me has been the positive impact on the profession in the sustainability arena because of VS existence. VS has nudged the whole profession in a positive direction although this will not be acknowledged publicly and is not necessary or even desirable in my view.”* Constructive comments that were given across the free text responses include: *“I am unsure of the distinction of vet sustain, various working groups, other groups etc.”*; *“My view is that all the information that Vet Sustain makes available to the veterinary sector should be freely available in order for clinics to become engaged”*.

4.3 Interviews

Twelve people were interviewed with the following roles across the four categories (note that this does not reflect the order the participants were interviewed in and that some people in categories 1,2 and 3 had also done one or more courses):

1. **Working group member or Chairs:** Participants 1-5 across the following working groups (some people were in more than one group (Equine, Food & Farming, Greener Veterinary Practice and Vet Curriculum group
2. **Corporate partners:** Participants 6 and 7
3. **Veterinary organisations:** Participants 8, 9 and 10
4. **Course participants:** Participants 11 and 12

The interviews have been written up using a structure that emerged across the questions. This means that the order of questions as reported here is not always the same as the order they were asked in the interviews; especially because for different interviews the order of questions was changed according to the conversation. Often interviewees addressed topics that most other interviewees covered in a separate question and in such cases the input on each topic has been included under the correct topic rather than in the order in which input was provided. In the interests of time and budget, the interviews have been written up without mentioning the specific details regarding who said what although in some places, quotes have been used, with permission from the interviewee regarding attribution.

Each interviewee first introduced themselves and their link with Vet Sustain. Each person had been involved in more than one way (apart Participant 8 who had not heard of Vet Sustain before the interview and had been approached due to her role at BVBA).

Q Tell me about your interest, and/or work in sustainability in the vet sector. Any key topic you are most passionate about?

Each interviewee outlined their key interest in the sustainability area. Most were interested in the subtopics across each sustainability goal, but Participant 10 mentioned that the more sociological areas (e.g. inclusion) seem a bit of a distraction from the more fundamental areas the veterinary profession can impact through change – see also comments on this below in the question about opportunities and future directions for Vet Sustain. Those involved with farm veterinary work expressed that they felt less close to the work Vet Sustain does on the clinic changes relevant to small animal work but were still interested in following those elements.

Q What role do you see Vet Sustain as having in the sustainability area?

Interviewees unanimously recognized Vet Sustain's unique and valued role in veterinary sustainability, emphasizing its sector-specific focus as represented in this quote from Participant 7 *"Vet Sustain has been putting it on the cards that veterinary medicine can be done in a sustainable way – that's the key impact"*. The primary theme that emerged was the importance of Vet Sustain's resources and tools, which were consistently highlighted as authoritative, evidence-based, and well-written. These resources, including templates, checklists, and procurement guidance, are considered highly useful

across all levels of veterinary practice. The Vet Sustain website was also specifically praised as a well-organized and accessible hub for sustainability tools.

A particularly valued aspect of Vet Sustain's role is its contribution to the evidence base, this was particularly strongly mentioned by those involved in farming. Interestingly, while sustainability is already embedded in farming discussions, and alternative tools are available in some cases, interviewees involved in the farm vet area saw a clear need for Vet Sustain's involvement.

Several interviewees expressed that Vet Sustain could continue to leverage, and increase, the recognition that it holds a position at the junction of animals, humans and health.

Specific feedback to this question included that Vet Sustain has a leadership role in this sector; that the organization's working groups, composed of knowledgeable volunteers from both veterinary and agricultural backgrounds, further strengthen its credibility; that Vet Sustain's role is in addressing the closed mindset prevalent among many veterinarians regarding sustainability; and that Vet Sustain's position at the intersection of One Health (environment, animals, humans) reflects its key role in the sector.

Several areas for development were naturally mentioned in this discussion and are addressed in more detail alongside responses regarding the future direction of Vet Sustain.

Q On a scale of 1-10, how much do you believe Vet Sustain has the power to create lasting change? What fuels your belief? [Huge potential (10), not power there at the moment (1)]

Responses to the question about Vet Sustain's potential to create lasting change revealed a shared belief in its significant potential, though many felt that its current influence has not fully reached that level yet.

Several interviewees rated Vet Sustain highly in terms of potential, some giving it a score of 10, but noted that the actual power to create widespread, lasting change is not fully there yet. They highlighted the high quality of the guidance and resources but expressed concerns that these materials may not be reaching a wide enough audience. There was a sense that engagement may have plateaued, reaching those already interested in sustainability, while struggling to reach broader, less-engaged groups. Although this was offset by reflections (including from the people expressing the plateau) that empowering 'the converted' to leverage their interest in this area could lead to greater impact than starting to engage the 'harder to reach' members of the profession.

As in the answers to other questions, a recurring theme was the need to expand reach and make a stronger business case for sustainability. Respondents suggested that to engage those not yet invested, not only environmental benefits but also practical incentives, like improved hygiene, efficiency, or cost savings should be highlighted.

Others spoke about the timing being right for Vet Sustain to make a bigger impact, given the growing public focus on sustainability. They believed that Vet Sustain has the potential to become much more visible and that many in the veterinary sector are eager to embrace its message.

The role of Vet Sustain as an educator was emphasized as its most powerful tool for driving change. Interviewees saw Vet Sustain's strength in empowering vets with knowledge and resources rather than engaging in lobbying, which they felt could compromise its objectivity.

There was also a recognition that policy frameworks for sustainability already exist in the UK, but that there is a gap in getting practitioners to implement them. Vet Sustain could play a key role in helping vets navigate these policies and understand how to integrate them into daily practice.

In summary, although there is a strong belief in Vet Sustain's potential to create lasting change, interviewees felt that realizing this potential requires broader engagement, clearer incentives for less-enthusiastic audiences, and continued focus on education and empowerment within the veterinary community.

Q Could you share a story or give an example of how your engagement with Vet Sustain has had an impact on you both personally and regarding work? (Or where your engagement with Vet Sustain created a meaningful shift in your work/ life/ community/ organisation.)

Not all interviewees were asked this question as some had spent longer on questions 1 and 2 than others and included some stories so this was asked depending on the time available. Examples of stories include:

- Participant 1 explained how she knew very little about sustainability before her involvement with Vet Sustain especially regarding the political and global context. Vet Sustain has provided this interviewee with significant learning opportunities and has opened doors to new initiatives including involvement with other projects and organisations addressing sustainability and local development campaigns. Vet Sustain has given the interviewee an improved understanding of behaviour change and communication strategies.
- Participant 6 explained how the biggest impact for her company was on the farm animal veterinary team who had all signed up for the Vet Sustain course ('A veterinary approach to sustainable food and farming') and found it beneficial in terms of learning that they could take back into advice they were giving to farm clients. The feedback was that the investment in terms of time was well placed. She also outlined how being involved in Vet Sustain's discussions (e.g., on reusables) prompt internal testing and exploration of initiatives in the organisation. Also, that involvement with Vet Sustain provides supporting context for discussions in the company and focuses attention on specific areas within their broader sustainability strategy.
- Participant 7 explained *"Vet Sustain have been very helpful in helping us to make business more sustainable, we have done projects in sustainability that wouldn't have attracted funding without the help and insight from Vet Sustain. They have been helpful as a critical friend, raising our awareness of different aspects."*
- Other interviewees explained the value in terms of climate literacy training meaning that discussions in teams could take place at a level where everyone had the same basic understanding, which eased discussions.
- Several of the interviewees described the impact in terms of the networking links and opportunities that have happened due to their involvement with Vet Sustain and the value in discussions providing a positive feedback loop in terms of gaining confidence that the changes they are making as individuals or in their groups are contributing to a bigger picture and so inspired to do more (e.g., *"given me the oomph"*; Participant 3). Participant 2 commented *"Vet Sustain is a nice organisation to be part of, we all have the same ethos, goals, nice place to be"*

to talk to people. Benefit from meetings, energising, 'can do it' feeling and then the real-world hits and it is depressing. But involvement with Vet Sustain has provided a good network of people to share ideas with and feel part of. Feeling part of solution is empowering."

- Several interviewees explained how their involvement with Vet Sustain had 'opened their eyes' to how many areas there are to sustainability and *"how the UK context relates to the global context"* (Participant 11).
- Those interviewees involved with universities or teaching outlined the value of the resource as teaching tools.
- Participant 12 provided an example. She ran a client meeting about sustainability. At the time farmers didn't really want to hear more on that topic but around 100 people attended and when she explained the links between for example, methane, farming and global warming and biodiversity reduction some of the audience appeared to change from a stance of looking for 'ways around the rules' to having a newfound understanding of the issues and the reasoning behind some policies.
- A story from Participant 2 illustrates the effect that Vet Sustain has on empowering individuals to do more. She explained how 4.5 years ago she was not aware of where to go for more information or to find like-minded people regarding sustainability. She was reading as much as she could, attending webinars but when she did the Carbon Literacy training things really fell into place – the vet specific nature of the course provided her with the knowledge and confidence to form a green group. *"Vet Sustain recognized very early the need for training"*.

Q What is one habit, belief, or perspective that has transformed because of your engagement with Vet Sustain? [measuring actions]

Interviewees described a range of personal and professional transformations resulting from their engagement with Vet Sustain, highlighting shifts in mindset, habits, and approaches to communication and education.

One key theme was the development of a more open and reflective mindset. Participant 1 noted how engaging with Vet Sustain became an opportunity for deep personal learning, helping them understand the complexities of sustainability and improving their approach to communication. They observed that many vets tend to have a risk-averse, closed mindset, but Vet Sustain encourages people to think more broadly and approach discussions on sustainability with greater empathy and openness.

Others described how their networks and influence had grown significantly. Participant 1 highlighted how connections made through Vet Sustain allowed them to tap into new opportunities and audiences, even outside the veterinary sector. This expanded network enabled them to integrate sustainability into broader frameworks, like practice standard schemes, and to focus on education and incentives tailored to different team members. Their engagement also inspired them to get involved with professional bodies like the BVA, using these platforms to push sustainability higher up the agenda and encourage more vets to use their voices to advocate for change.

For some, the transformation was deeply personal. Participant 2 shared how her engagement with Vet Sustain, and other organisations, has made her more aware of waste and resource use in her own life. This shift extended into her role as an educator, where she now actively teaches her children about sustainability and engages with local schools. She has given talks on environmental issues and

even organized an art competition for children, asking them to illustrate what biodiversity means to them. The winning artwork will be featured on an interpretation board at a local woodland, helping to instil environmental awareness in the community. Her broader goal is to make sustainability conversations a normal part of everyday life, especially for younger generations, even though it is not yet fully embedded in school curriculums.

Several respondents noted that even simple changes, such as recycling initiatives, reducing mileage, or promoting more efficient energy use, were partly inspired by Vet Sustain but also driven by existing cost-saving strategies within practices. Overall, the interviewees described their engagement with Vet Sustain as transformative, helping them not only adopt more sustainable practices but also become advocates and educators, spreading awareness through both professional channels and personal connections.

Q Have you witnessed a ripple effect of change inspired by your journey with us? Tell us about it.

The interviewees described several examples of how their engagement with Vet Sustain has had a ‘ripple effect’ extending beyond their immediate work environments and influencing conversations, practices, and even personal lives. For some, this ripple effect has started at home. Participant 1 noted how their husband has become more aware of sustainability issues, and others described challenges associated with the complexity in trying to adopt fully sustainable practices. Participant 7 explained that Vet Sustain’s work has put indirect pressure on the pharmaceutical industry *“Organisations now have a sustainability agenda attributable to Vet Sustain, for example in putting on pressure for more sustainable packaging. Pressure has come to bear that wasn’t there before so they are having an influence across the sector.”*

At the institutional level, the ripple effect has been felt within vet schools, where discussions around sustainability have expanded beyond the classroom. Participant 4 highlighted debate about switching from disposable to cloth materials in hospital settings — acknowledging that while these changes may require more labour, they are often more cost-effective. The conversation has also broadened into areas like farming and wildlife conservation, sparking thoughtful debates and encouraging a more holistic approach to sustainability in veterinary education.

For others, the ripple effect has amplified their influence across wider networks. Participant 12 shared how their involvement has led them to join working groups and participate in conferences, increasing their impact and extending discussions on sustainability to a broader audience. This engagement has allowed them to champion Vet Sustain’s mission on larger platforms, further magnifying the ripple effect.

In practical settings, the ripple effect has encouraged new approaches and services. Participant 11, for example, mentioned how local practice discussions have led to projects like fly control, which not only reduce chemical use but also offer an additional income stream. He also tries to bring up sustainability with industry bodies like Red Tractor, raising awareness and encouraging dialogue. However, he noted challenges in communication — highlighting that while there is some support for sustainable practices, the overuse of certain terms can alienate people, creating resistance rather than engagement.

Overall, from the interviewee responses, the ripple effect of engaging with Vet Sustain has led to increased awareness, new initiatives, and broader conversations. Although challenges remain, such as overcoming scepticism or balancing sustainability with practicality, the influence continues to grow, both personally and professionally, across diverse sectors of the veterinary field.

Q Have any new doors or opportunities opened for you or others because of your involvement with Vet Sustain? Please describe.

This question wasn't asked to all interviewees due to time but those who were asked either gave examples of the opportunities that had arisen due to their involvement or expressed the sentiment that doors could potentially open due to their involvement. Participant 1, listed examples of how being involved with Vet Sustain had led to her recognising issues local to her and acting on that recognition to make change. Participant 7 mentioned that projects have come to the fore partly due to the influence of Vet Sustain in "*pricking consciences*" and that some projects wouldn't have been funded if it wasn't for the information and support provided by Vet Sustain. Several people listed examples of speaking and writing opportunities that had arisen due to their involvement with Vet Sustain (with some saying Vet Sustain was directly responsible and others acknowledging that it had a role alongside other factors).

Q What sort of reception do you tend to get when mention Vet Sustain?

Regarding the reception people get when they mention Vet Sustain interviewees described that as expected, the people they encounter vary. Some are highly engaged and supportive, while others are unaware of Vet Sustain or sceptical about its role. Whether interviewees found people knew about Vet Sustain or not depended largely on their role.

Interestingly, none of the interviewees felt that there was any perception of Vet Sustain being 'pushy' and when pressed some expanded this sentiment and mentioned that being a non-profit probably helped with this. Interviewees agreed that Vet Sustain is seen as a "friendly face" in sustainability, providing evidence-based resources without strong ideological pressure. Peer influence plays a role—vets are often introduced to Vet Sustain through colleagues sharing experiences. Despite challenges, there is interest in what Vet Sustain is doing, and keeping sustainability, a visible priority remains important.

Participant 2 highlighted that the reception was not an issue but that the main barriers to more engagement in the greener practice work include lack of protected time, lack of bosses recognising that sustainability efforts require a leadership role, and financial concerns about sustainability investments (e.g., solar panels requiring upfront costs).

Participant 6 mentioned how corporate groups of practices need tailored guidance that aligns with their frameworks and national contracts. This is partly because in corporate settings, decision-making structures can complicate adoption, as many recommendations assume independent practice control. This interviewee also mentioned that there is value in them employing Vet Sustain to provide the training (e.g., carbon literacy), but ensuring changes are feasible within corporate structures is key. The interviewee mentioned that pressure from individual clinics to increase sustainability could be effective.

Participant 7 described Vet Sustain's communication style "*They are balanced, which is difficult in this area as in the broader context of sustainability attracts pressure groups with an agenda and [Vet Sustain] are managing well to steer a line of keeping to evidence and not leaning too much into pressure groups, which would marginalise them.*"

Again, opportunities for how Vet Sustain could develop were suggested in this question and those comments have been included in the section about opportunities.

Q Has the work of Vet Sustain had any bearing on any discussions or policies at your practice/work/organisation?

The responses to this question highlight the varied but generally positive impact of Vet Sustain on discussions and policies across different practices and organizations. Many noted that Vet Sustain has been instrumental in encouraging practical changes at the practice level – changing policies in independent practices more easily than those that are part of corporate groups - with measurable results such as reductions in single-use items and the promotion of reusables. These tangible outcomes have sparked more in-depth conversations, particularly around farming practices, and have served as prompts for further ideas and discussions.

Within the education sector, sustainability groups and individuals are active, but progress has been slow and somewhat fragmented. Student ambassadors have played a key role in fostering discussions and working groups have created spaces for more in-depth conversations. However, much of the momentum is still driven by individual passion rather than centralized efforts. In some universities, there have been challenges in integrating sustainability more deeply into the curriculum due to resource constraints. There was a sense of frustration that sustainability was not seen as a priority due to a lack of staff capacity to explore the financial case for change. Despite this, there was recognition that if Vet Sustain could demonstrate clear financial benefits, such as attracting more students or reducing costs, while not increasing workloads, it will help drive further adoption including in the at the policy level. Participant 8 suggested that even one lecture on sustainability would be enough to leave an impact on some students reflecting that some single lectures had been memorable for various reasons. Participant 5 noted that sometimes students feel that sustainability and welfare do not align with, for example, maximising production regarding farming but once they realise that it is OK to have an open discussion on these concerns they engage.

Participant 10 explained that engagement with Vet Sustain has helped to shift BVA's agenda and helped to keep sustainability on the agenda of individuals and organisations.

Overall, the work of Vet Sustain has not only influenced individual practices and policies but has also created a broader dialogue around sustainability. While challenges remain in embedding sustainability into policies, such as limited resources, staff engagement, and competing priorities, the influence of Vet Sustain is evident in the growing awareness and ongoing discussions it has helped foster across the sector.

Q What are some of the barriers and opportunities regarding sustainability, Vet Sustain and veterinary institutions such as BVA, BVNA etc.?

Interviewees agreed that for Vet Sustain to amplify its impact and drive meaningful change, it must engage strategically and proactively with influential organizations and institutions such as the British Veterinary Association (BVA), the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), and species-specific bodies such as the BCVA (British Cattle Veterinary Association). Comments on this question fell into several mechanisms of potential action and reflections as follows.

1. Elevating Sustainability on Institutional Agendas: A recurring theme was the sense that sustainability remains low on the agenda in many veterinary institutions, although is considered more embedded in those focussed on farming and agriculture due to the intrinsic link between that sector and sustainability. Interviewees recognised the need for Vet Sustain to have a closer collaboration

with these bodies to drive sustainability up the priority list or support current activities in different ways. Ideas included encouraging Vet Sustain representatives or sustainability advocates to seek leadership positions, such as applying for the role of BVA President or securing places on key BVA councils and working groups. Interviewees also highlighted the need to encourage more veterinary professionals to actively participate in organizations, helping to raise sustainability higher on the collective agenda. Building a strong, vocal community of sustainability-minded vets within these bodies could create momentum and amplify Vet Sustain's influence.

2. Collaborating on Policy Development and Advocacy: Vet Sustain was seen as having the potential to act as a credible source of expertise in policy development, particularly around environmental and agricultural sustainability. One suggestion was that Vet Sustain could partner with the BVA and other institutions to co-develop sustainability policies, especially in areas where current frameworks are lacking, such as sustainable livestock practices. One proposed approach was for the BVA to set up working groups focused on specific sustainability challenges, with Vet Sustain taking part to provide expert input and evidence-based guidance. This could help ensure that policies are both practical and impactful. Additionally, Participant 9 noted that linking Vet Sustain's expertise to established research bodies such as the BBSRC (Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council) could strengthen credibility and encourage greener policies within livestock and farming sectors.

Participant 10 recognised that while the BVA is aware of sustainability challenges, Vet Sustain could play a role in helping to develop proactive, forward-thinking sustainability initiatives with greater weight in government lobbying and policy influence.

3. Educational institutions: Participant 12 highlighted the RCVS's role in setting learning objectives and competencies for vet schools and suggested that Vet Sustain should advocate for sustainability to be embedded as a core competency. This would ensure that all vet schools include sustainability in their curriculum as an integral part of veterinary training. There was also a suggestion for Vet Students to collaborate with the BVA's student networks, such as the Association of Veterinary Students, to engage future vets early in their careers. By providing educational resources and curriculum support, Vet Sustain could help ensure that sustainability becomes a thread woven throughout veterinary education, rather than siloed in elective modules.

4. Demonstrating Value and Overcoming Barriers: Interviewees recognized that one barrier to deeper institutional engagement is demonstrating the value proposition of sustainability initiatives. Vet Sustain is encouraged to frame its messaging around what is in it for organizations, whether that be cost savings, improved public perception, or alignment with regulatory trends. By positioning sustainability as a practical and beneficial strategy, rather than a moral obligation, Vet Sustain might be able to leverage stronger institutional support.

Several interviewees expressed optimism about the increasing awareness of sustainability within institutions such as the BVA and RCVS, but one raised concern about fragmentation regarding multiple working groups and committees potentially duplicating efforts. They suggested that Vet Sustain could act as a unifying force, helping to coordinate efforts across institutions to ensure everyone is working towards shared goals. This could involve setting up cross-institutional working groups, sharing best practices, and creating a more cohesive approach to sustainability across the veterinary profession.

In summary, interviewees believe that for Vet Sustain to have a broader and more lasting impact, it should deepen its engagement with key veterinary institutions. By advocating for policy changes, collaborating on curriculum development, and acting as a central, credible voice for sustainability, Vet Sustain will be able to drive systemic change across the profession. Strategic leadership, focused

messaging, and strong alliances will be key to ensuring that sustainability becomes embedded not only in individual practices but also in the broader frameworks that shape the veterinary sector.

Another perspective: Participant 8 was approached due to their role on the board of a veterinary organisation (BVBA) and had not completed the survey nor previously heard about Vet Sustain. The questions asked for this interview were therefore different to those asked in the other interviews and focussed more on their perceptions of the issue of sustainability in the vet sector, and questions regarding perceptions of Vet Sustain now was aware. Participant 8 reflected on how initially upon hearing about Vet Sustain they reflected on the need to address procurement processes to move away from single-use plastics and waste management and that after having had a quick look at the website and hearing the interviewers introduction became interested and reflective about the wider sustainability issues (aligned with the sustainability goals). This interview was useful as recognised that members of the BVBA are often working from home professionally so some of the typical issues do not arise but that there are still opportunities to consider sustainability.

The interviewee highlighted that due to the nature of the work behaviourists including veterinary behaviourists are compassionate people in the career as a vocation and making a change, and as such would likely recognize that considering the environment and sustainability as a good fit for their business. It was suggested that members of the BVBA might value a top tips resource on how members could do more working from home – for example considering their digital footprint and that if advertised such a focus on sustainability might even give them a competitive advantage in the marketplace. This could provide a link with Vet Sustain. As BVBA is linked closely with other behaviour organizations (e.g. FABC and APBC such a tool would potentially be embraced by those organizations too and could be potential for partnering. Also, this would be relevant for the increasing numbers of vets practicing telemedicine as part of their careers or during a break from practice.

Q What bold idea or opportunity would you like to see us pursue to amplify our (collective) impact?

Interviewees shared a wide range of bold ideas and opportunities for Vet Sustain to amplify its impact, focusing on expanding reach, deepening influence, and driving systemic change across the veterinary sector.

1. **Broadening audience and reach:** A recurring theme for responses to this question was the perception that Vet Sustain primarily engages those already interested in sustainability, which, while valuable for empowering existing advocates, limits its broader influence. Interviewees emphasized the need for wider engagement, especially among less engaged groups like corporate-owned practices and more sceptical individuals. Several suggested that making a stronger business case for sustainability, highlighting cost-saving benefits, could help bring more people on board. Demonstrating how sustainable practices can save money or improve operational efficiency was seen as a persuasive way to engage practices hesitant due to perceived higher costs. It should be noted that although most respondents at some point in their interviews expressed that Vet Sustain might be primarily reaching audiences already engaged in the sustainability area, this was generally not considered to be entirely negative as the role in empowering, supporting and further developing those who are interested, was highly valued.
2. **Developing clearer business cases for sustainability:** The need for a clear business case was again emphasised when answering this question. Sustainability efforts need clearer business incentives

to gain traction with the example given that some practices hesitate due to perceived higher costs (e.g., waste reduction alternatives being more expensive). A suggestion was that focusing on "low-hanging fruit" could help engage practices initially before moving to larger changes. Participant 7 noted that the veterinary medicine area is restricted by regulations and so even if there was an economic benefit in moving to more sustainable packaging or materials it wouldn't be viable unless it didn't need regulatory approval.

3. **Embedding Sustainability in Veterinary Education:** Many interviewees highlighted the veterinary curriculum as a crucial area for development, not only those interviewed from academia or involved in the curriculum working group. They noted that students often graduate with limited exposure to sustainability, suggesting that Vet Sustain should continue to pursue structured partnerships with universities to embed sustainability into courses from the first year. Ideas included providing resources, templates, and presentations for both students and academic staff, and organizing initiatives like roadshows or open days to highlight sustainability efforts at vet schools. The goal would be to make sustainability a core component of veterinary education, normalizing it from the start.
4. **Acting as a Central Resource Hub:** Several interviewees saw potential for Vet Sustain to continue to expand its role as a central hub for sustainability resources, collating tools, research, and case studies from across sectors. This could include sharing carbon calculators, methane reduction research, and best practices from both clinical and farming contexts. By serving as a one-stop-shop for sustainability knowledge, Vet Sustain could strengthen its position as the go-to resource for vets seeking practical guidance. Regarding resources, interviewees stressed the importance of accessible, bite-sized education to help busy professionals integrate sustainability into their practices. Suggestions included creating more webinars, CPD courses, and practical guides, like the successful Food and Farming CPD course. An increased focus on accreditation was also highlighted as an area that could lead to significant impact. Another suggestion (Participant 3) was creating a 'clinical board' of researchers who could find answers to questions – this would free up the time of volunteers. A suggestion (Participant 12) for a new resource was to collate success stories/case studies to build momentum. Drawing parallels with initiatives like the antimicrobial resistance success group, which gained traction by celebrating clear wins, Vet Sustain could similarly highlight examples where sustainable practices have delivered measurable benefits. This kind of positive messaging through an expanding resource library could help overcome scepticism and inspire wider adoption of sustainability initiatives.
5. **Driving Cross-Sector Collaboration:** There was strong support for Vet Sustain to take on a more active role in bringing together key players across the profession and related professions (e.g., agronomists). Interviewees suggested that Vet Sustain could act as an independent convener, uniting corporate groups, individual practices, and industry bodies around shared sustainability goals. One specific idea (Participant 6) was for Vet Sustain to spearhead industry-wide initiatives, such as targeting a 20% reduction in low-flow anaesthesia by 2026, with companies and practices signing up to a collective commitment. This kind of focused, measurable campaign could unite the profession, attract positive media attention, and gain attention from corporate partners. Another suggestion was for Vet Sustain to strengthen links with research institutions to produce robust data; for example, around the carbon footprint of veterinary practice to help bolster the evidence-based reputation Vet Sustain has already established. This was also mentioned by Participant 7 who described that there is a significant need for more scientific scrutiny and good quality science

regarding sustainability. For example, some issues are complex and some published work doesn't take this into account and is oversimplified and therefore not robust scientifically.

6. **Strengthening Policy Influence and Institutional Links:** Some respondents suggested that Vet Sustain could deepen its policy engagement by collaborating more closely with influential bodies like the BVA and DEFRA. There was a call for Vet Sustain to act as a credible evidence provider for policy development, particularly around sustainable livestock practices and environmental regulations. For example, Vet Sustain could contribute expertise to working groups within other organisations or help shape new policies by providing research-backed recommendations. Stronger connections with academic institutions, such as Harper Adams' School of Sustainable Food & Farming, were also seen as potential valuable partnerships.

Although not widely represented, one interviewee gave a note of caution – encouraging Vet Sustain to stay focused on core environmental issues like climate change and biodiversity, rather than diluting the message by expanding into other wider sustainability areas such as workplace well-being or diversity. This view was mentioned by one of the people interviewed later so the suggestion could not be posed to the other interviewees, which would have been interesting.

In summary, interviewees envision Vet Sustain playing a more expansive, strategic, and unifying role—deepening its educational impact, driving collaboration across sectors, and making sustainability an integral part of veterinary education and practice. By focusing on clear, practical benefits and leading industry-wide initiatives, Vet Sustain could significantly amplify its influence and help create lasting, systemic change.

Summary across interviews: In summary, the interviewees provided case studies, reflections and examples of how Vet Sustain had impacted them, their organisations and the veterinary sector. Although there was a lot of interest in considering how Vet Sustain could evolve and expand, there was an overarching sense of pride and achievement in those that has been involved with Vet Sustain and a sense of interest and keenness to collaborate in those who not been more than superficially involved. Reflections such as “... when it started, I thought it would go far and can now see buy in and movement” (Participant 4) show a sense of progression and impact so far. Participant 7 summarised Vet Sustain's impact “Vet Sustain have driven change, I have seen it, in different ways. They have put sustainability on the table as something that can happen. [...] Some [of their] projects and work has changed behaviour – for example anaesthetics use is the most visible. Practices look to them for guidance, they are an authoritative source of information driving a change in behaviour that didn't exist before Vet Sustain came along.”

5. Discussion

5.1 Discussion of survey data

Vet Sustain has a vision for the veterinary professions to be enabled as leading forces for sustainability. Evidence that this is taking place should be demonstrated by responses that show that people who have engaged with Vet Sustain continue to do so, increase their knowledge, confidence, action, and attitude, and continue to spread the messages of sustainability. When asked about the duration of their engagement with Vet Sustain, the most common response (75 of 251) was that the engagement was ongoing, regardless of the duration to date. This suggests that once people start engaging with Vet Sustain, they continue to do so. 65% of survey participants said that their engagement with Vet Sustain had increased (significantly or moderately) their awareness of sustainability and 82% felt more

confident to discuss sustainability in the veterinary sector. Since 25% of participants had identified difficulties engaging with colleagues/management as a key barrier to change, this increased confidence has the potential to enable increased leadership. Change is being inspired as a result of Vet Sustain interventions, including use of the carbon calculator, greater consideration of antibiotics and medicine for parasite control, implementation of wellbeing teams, better waste management, reduction of single use items and improved recycling, and greener forms of travel. Practice policies have been newly implemented particularly regarding environmental and use of medicines for parasite control.

The Vet Sustain mission is to enable and inspire veterinary professionals to continually improve the health and wellbeing of animals, people, and the environment. That most participants were unable to prioritise the sustainability issues, because they recognised that all were important, suggests that they are indeed inspired to improve the health and wellbeing of animals, people, and the environment. Further evidence supporting the ongoing success of the Vet Sustain mission is demonstrated by the result that while sustainability was already important to 65% of survey participants, 26% stated that Vet Sustain had increased their awareness of sustainability in the veterinary sector and a further 2% said that sustainability now meant much more to them, thanks to Vet Sustain. Thoughts prompted by the name “Vet Sustain” and/or the logo were highly positive, as seen in the earlier “word cloud” and there is clearly a need, with people commenting on how they have been inspired to do more, feel more confident to do more and/or feel gratitude towards Vet Sustain for empowering them. 79% of participants thought that Vet Sustain had contributed to meaningful outcomes, 74% agreed/strongly agreed that Vet Sustain will have a lasting positive impact on their work or approach to sustainability and 55% stated that their involvement with Vet Sustain prompted them to take more action for the environment, animal welfare, or social wellbeing.

Vet Sustain’s goals are:

1. Diverse and abundant wildlife
2. A good life for animals
3. Net zero warming
4. Health and happiness
5. A no-waste society
6. Enough clean water for all

To show how well Vet Sustain are meeting these goals, it would be necessary to demonstrate that those participating in Vet Sustain interventions are increasing their knowledge of each goal and increasing their confidence in talking about and advocating for it. Survey participants were asked to give their sustainability priority and were unable to do so because they largely wanted to keep all as having equivalent importance. As seen in the two paragraphs above, 65% had increased their knowledge of sustainability and 82% had increased their confidence in talking about sustainability in the veterinary sector. This suggests that the goals were being met, although specifically which goals was not necessarily mentioned.

5.2 Discussion of interview data

From across the interviews emerged a perception that Vet Sustain has played a role in maintaining sustainability on organizational agendas, aligning with broader industry goals, such as those

championed by the BVA. One of the standout impacts of Vet Sustain has been its training resources, particularly the carbon literacy training. This program was praised for consolidating information into a comprehensive and accessible format, offering practical, vet-specific solutions that empowered individuals to take the lead in sustainability initiatives. Respondents highlighted how the training provided them with the confidence and tools to establish green groups and implement meaningful changes.

The interviews provided a comprehensive overview of Vet Sustain's influence and opportunities within the veterinary sector. Interviewees consistently recognized Vet Sustain's unique role in promoting sustainability in the veterinary sector, particularly valuing its evidence-based resources, which help integrate sustainable practices into veterinary work. While the interviewees acknowledged Vet Sustain's strong potential to drive lasting change, they noted that its influence remains somewhat limited, often reaching those already interested in sustainability rather than expanding to less-engaged groups. However, it was also recognised that the key value of Vet Sustain is in building networks, knowledge, and confidence in the engaged segment of the sector to enable those people to then drive wider change. A recurring theme was the importance of broadening Vet Sustain's outreach, developing clearer business cases for sustainability, and leveraging its educational role to empower veterinary professionals with practical tools and knowledge.

The personal impact of Vet Sustain on interviewees was significant, with many highlighting transformative changes in mindset, habits, and professional practices. Several participants described how Vet Sustain's resources and networking opportunities deepened their understanding of sustainability and inspired them to implement meaningful changes within their practices and communities. Examples ranged from introducing new sustainability initiatives in vet practices to influencing discussions within educational institutions and corporate groups. The ripple effect extended beyond professional circles, impacting personal lives, and fostering broader conversations on sustainability. Overall, the interviews underscored Vet Sustain's role as an empowering force, fostering collaboration, education, and a sense of community among veterinary professionals passionate about sustainability.

5.3 Discussion overall

This section provides a summary of the KPIs against the strategic elements (vision, mission and goals).

1. Vision: Enabling veterinary professionals as leading forces for sustainability

- **Progress in terms of KPI:** 'Increased scores for knowledge, confidence, action, and attitude.'
 - Vet Sustain is having an increasing presence at conferences (e.g. BCVA in October 2024, BSAVA panel discussions x 4 in March 2025, Vet Trust Plenary Keynote session in June 2025). Reaching increasingly more people.
 - 82% of survey participants reported increased confidence in discussing sustainability after engaging with Vet Sustain.
 - 65% surveyed indicated a significant or moderate increase in awareness of sustainability challenges.
 - Actions mentioned in the survey included waste reduction, improved use of medicines for parasite control, and carbon footprint tracking using Vet Sustain's carbon calculator.

- Interviewees highlighted significant changes in mindset and confidence, with many citing Vet Sustain's resources as instrumental in enabling them to lead sustainability initiatives. Examples included leading sustainability discussions within organizations.

Assessment: KPIs met. Both survey and interview data show increased knowledge, confidence, and action among participants, though there's room to expand reach beyond already engaged individuals.

2. Mission: Inspiring continuous improvement in health and wellbeing of animals, people, and the environment

- **Progress in terms of KPI** 'Increased scores for knowledge, confidence, action, and attitude; participants citing Vet Sustain as a source of inspiration.'
 - 74% of those surveyed agreed that their engagement with Vet Sustain would have a lasting positive impact on their work or approach to sustainability.
 - 55% of survey respondents reported that their involvement prompted personal actions beyond work, such as sustainable living choices.
 - Participants frequently cited Vet Sustain as an inspiration, with positive comments about feeling empowered and connected.
 - Interviewees shared personal stories of how Vet Sustain inspired professional and personal changes, from advocating for policy shifts to implementing sustainable farming practices. Many highlighted how Vet Sustain's messaging fostered a deeper connection to sustainability, aligning with their ethical values.

Assessment: KPIs met. The data shows that Vet Sustain inspires both professional and personal changes, fostering continuous improvement aligned with its mission.

3. Goals: Progress across six sustainability goals

- **Progress in terms of KPI** 'Increased knowledge, confidence, and actions related to:
 1. Diverse and abundant wildlife
 2. A good life for animals
 3. Net zero warming
 4. Health and happiness
 5. A no-waste society
 6. Enough clean water for all'
 - Participants struggled to prioritize specific sustainability issues, with many viewing them as equally important. Actions were most notable in waste reduction, carbon footprint tracking, and improved antimicrobial stewardship. Less progress was reported on water conservation and wildlife protection, indicating potential areas for growth. However, there were some examples of actions taken regarding rewilding areas owned by veterinary practices and individuals' gardens.
 - Interviewees cited success in addressing net zero goals (e.g., adoption of low-flow anaesthetic gas to reduce emissions) and promoting animal welfare through better practices. Wildlife and clean water goals received less attention, highlighting gaps in engagement with certain areas.

Assessment: Partially met. Strong progress on waste reduction, carbon management, and animal welfare, but less impact on goals like wildlife conservation and water use.

4. Objectives: Organizational growth and systemic integration

- **Objective 1 KPI** 'Build an online network of 5,000 veterinary professionals by 2020'

- Vet Sustain has an online community of around 3100 followers of Vet Sustain on Facebook, 3600 members of the Veterinary Sustainability Forum on Facebook and 1621 followers on Instagram. It is not known how much overlap there is of people in more than one of those groups and the level of engagement will vary. If also count the numbers of people who are reached through the ripple effect these numbers might reflect only part of the online network, but the number is likely to be lower than the 5,000 noted in the objective.
- Interviewees highlighted the strength of Vet Sustain's online networks, particularly the Facebook groups and working groups.

Assessment: KPI likely met, but more analysis of the numbers and nature of engagement of the online network is needed.

- **Objective 2 KPI** 'Integrate sustainability into all UK veterinary school curricula by 2022.'
 - 10 UK vet schools are represented on the curriculum working group (Nottingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Harper Keele, UCLAN, Surrey, RVC, UCD, Liverpool, and Cambridge).
 - Some progress was noted from survey participants, with sustainability included in certain universities but integration is inconsistent.
 - Interviewees involved in education reported fragmented progress, with challenges in embedding sustainability across all curricula.

Assessment: KPI partially met, with notable progress but inconsistent implementation.

- **Objective 3:** 'Integrate sustainability into policy and standards of key UK veterinary associations by 2025'
 - Survey participants noted that sustainability is discussed within professional bodies, but policy integration is still limited.
 - Some interviewees indicated Vet Sustain's influence on BVA's agenda but recognized the need for stronger policy collaboration.

Assessment: KPI in progress, with Vet Sustain influencing discussions but limited formal policy changes.

- **Objective 4:** 'Integrate sustainability practices into >50% of UK veterinary practices by 2025'
 - 75% of survey participants felt Vet Sustain had contributed to meaningful sustainability outcomes in their sector, but exact adoption rates are unclear.
 - Interviewees noted progress, particularly in independent practices, but less uptake in corporate-owned practices.









Assessment: KPI partially met, with strong progress in some practices but gaps in corporate engagement.

- **Objective 5:** 'Equip veterinary professionals and vet-led businesses with tools to support sustainability by 2025'
 - Tools like the carbon calculator and sustainability checklists were widely used and praised by survey participants.
 - Three module courses have also been developed - "A sustainable approach to clinical veterinary practice", "A veterinary approach to sustainable food and farming" and "Carbon Literacy" - as well as seven sustainability guides. The "Carbon Calculator" has had 180 users worldwide in 2023-2024, saving an estimated 123,908 kg CO₂ equivalent (=123.9 tonnes CO₂ equivalent).

- Interviewees emphasized the value of these tools in enabling real-world changes.

Assessment: KPI met, with widespread use of Vet Sustain's practical tools supporting sustainable practices.

Table 3: Overall KPI Assessment

KPI Category		Status
Vision		Met – Increased knowledge, confidence, and action among professionals.
Mission		Met – Participants inspired to make lasting professional and personal changes.
Goals		Partially Met – Strong progress in waste reduction and net zero goals, gaps in some areas.
Objective 1		Likely Met – Robust online community engagement, though exact figures are unverified.
Objective 2		Partially Met – Sustainability included in some curricula but inconsistent across schools.
Objective 3		In Progress – Growing influence on policy discussions, limited formal integration.
Objective 4		Partially Met – Some practice-level changes, but limited reach in corporate practices.
Objective 5		Met – Tools widely used and valued across the sector.

Considering the strategic approaches, associated activities and what could be measured as per Table 2 in terms of whether the data shows that these have been met and had the intended outcomes.

Table 4: Linking the strategic approaches with evidence from the data.

Strategic approach	What to measure using survey and interview approach	Brief check regarding whether data shows that these activities have been met and had the intended outcome.
Enablement through the development of tools and training (for activities see table 2)	<p>Have tools been generated to the standards described?</p> <p>Does feedback suggest that the resources enable the user to adopt sustainability principles and practices?</p>	<p>The data strongly shows that the toolkits, courses and materials have been produced and are evidence-based.</p> <p>Feedback clearly showed that they do enable the user to not only develop their learning but to apply it to various situations and contexts.</p>
Enablement through training	<p>Have regular webinar series, events and training courses taken place?</p> <p>Do users report enablement through training to apply sustainability principles and practices?</p>	<p>Regular educational opportunities have been provided, and users report enablement as a result.</p>

Inspiration through communication	<p>Have the newsletter, blogs, articles, case studies and stories been produced?</p> <p>Have readers been inspired through the production of these materials?</p> <p>Do the materials generate discussion through the Facebook group mentioned?</p> <p>Does feedback show that the public Facebook page boost the visibility of how vet professionals can drive sustainability in the veterinary sector?</p>	<p>Communication materials have been produced and have inspired readers to be more involved in the sustainability efforts. The social media posts are actively followed and interacted with.</p>
Inspiration through advocacy	<p>Has Vet Sustain advocated veterinary leadership in sustainability through campaigns?</p> <p>Does feedback show that the directors, working group members and champions advocate policy uptake and local action?</p>	<p>Vet Sustain has advocated veterinary leadership and is clearly seen as authoritative in the field.</p> <p>Members of the working groups interviewed were very passionate and positive about their involvement as well as active in advocating policy uptake and action in their spheres of influence.</p>

5.4 Consideration of the data in terms of theories and models

Looking at the impact assessment through various lenses can help to synthesise the data and draw out detailed recommendations for improving impact. Some of the information in this section is repetitive as it is put through each lens.

5.4.1 SWOT analysis from survey and interview data

Table 5: SWOT analysis from the survey and interview data.

<p>Strengths</p> <p>Vet Sustain has established itself as a credible and influential force within the veterinary sector, championing sustainability through evidence-based resources and sector-specific guidance. Its tools, such as carbon calculators, templates, and checklists, are highly valued for their practicality and accessibility. The organization has successfully fostered a sense</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p> <p>Despite its achievements, there is a perception that Vet Sustain struggles with limited reach beyond those already engaged or interested in sustainability. There is also a perception that its influence is plateauing, mainly empowering the "converted" while failing to engage harder-to-reach groups. The organization also faces challenges in articulating strong business cases</p>
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<p>of community and empowerment among veterinary professionals, encouraging positive behavioural changes and professional development. Its educational initiatives, particularly the carbon literacy training, have been transformative, boosting confidence and knowledge among participants. Vet Sustain's non-profit status and approachable image help maintain a reputation as a trusted, 'non-pushy' advocate for sustainability.</p>	<p>for sustainability, which limits its appeal to corporate practices concerned about costs in particular. Some feedback highlighted confusion over Vet Sustain's messaging and organizational structure, with calls for clearer guidance. Additionally, barriers including lack of time, financial constraints, and limited leadership buy-in within veterinary practices hinder the full implementation of Vet Sustain's initiatives.</p>
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>Vet Sustain has significant potential to expand its impact by broadening its reach to less engaged groups and to cement engagement with groups of people and organisations interested in sustainability but not yet engaged with Vet Sustain. Developing clearer business cases that emphasize the cost-saving and efficiency benefits of sustainable practices could drive wider adoption. Expanding the work of the curriculum working group and therefore collaborations with veterinary schools offers an opportunity to embed sustainability more deeply into curricula, shaping future professionals from the start. Acting as a central hub for sustainability resources, sharing success stories, and leading industry-wide initiatives, such as reducing specific environmental impacts, could further cement Vet Sustain's leadership role. Strengthening policy influence and building cross-sector partnerships can also amplify its impact.</p>	<p>Threats</p> <p>Threats were not a key emerging factor from the surveys or interviews. However, threats mentioned included potentially faces engagement fatigue and skepticism within the sector, particularly among professionals who view sustainability efforts as costly or time-consuming. Competition from other organizations offering similar resources could threaten course sales but as Vet Sustain is specific to the veterinary sector this is considered a minor concern. Internal challenges, such as limited capacity and reliance on volunteers, may hinder its ability to scale initiatives.</p>

5.4.2 Stage of Change Model

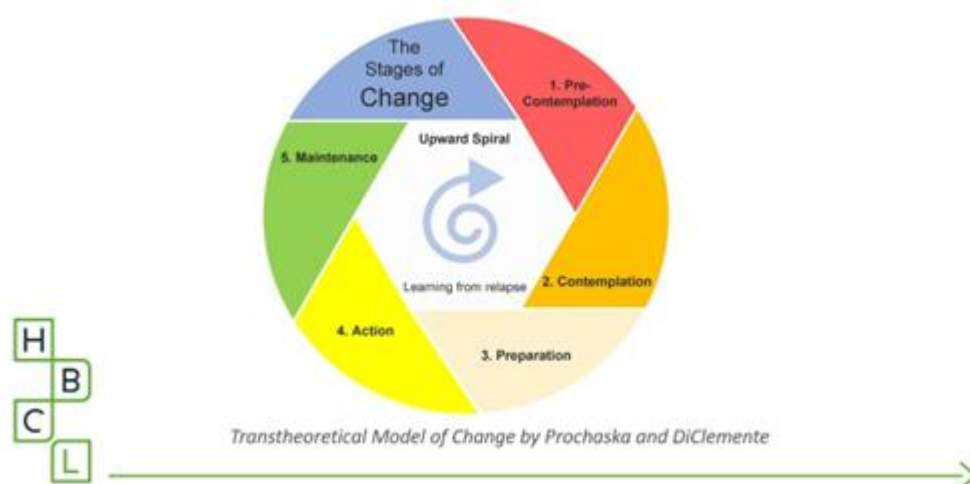


Figure 11. Stages of Change Model (visualised with permission from Prochaska et al.)

The transtheoretical model (TTM), also known as the Stage of Change (SoC) model (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1984 & 1992; Figure 11), is an established model that suggests that a person's decision-making process and intentional behavioural change occurs by moving through stages and is not a single movement from one way of behaving to another. Developed to identify an individual's readiness for changing their current behaviour, it splits target groups into categories depending on their state of preparedness for change. The SoC model is made up of five sequential stages, that an individual transitions through as they change from one behaviour to another, including: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance; it also recognises that a person may relapse and move back to a former stage at any point. The early stages of the SoC relate to an intention to change (i.e., pre-contemplation, contemplation, and preparation) whereas the later stages focus on the actual behaviour change (i.e., action, maintenance, and termination). Applying this model to the Vet Sustain impact assessment reveals how veterinary professionals and practices engage with sustainability efforts.

1. Precontemplation (Unaware/Uninterested): Some veterinary professionals and practices remain in this stage, unaware of Vet Sustain or not yet considering sustainability as a priority. Survey responses indicated that while most participants were already interested in sustainability, a small portion had only recently become aware of Vet Sustain through the survey or external recommendations. Barriers such as lack of time, financial concerns, or scepticism about sustainability's relevance keep some in this stage.

Opportunity: Vet Sustain can target this group by raising awareness of the practical and financial benefits of sustainability, using success stories and relatable case studies to make the concept more approachable.

2. Contemplation (Aware but Ambivalent): A significant portion of participants fall into this stage, recognizing the importance of sustainability but unsure how to implement changes. Survey data showed that many respondents were inspired by Vet Sustain but struggled with barriers including leadership buy-in, lack of time, or unclear guidance. Some interviewees expressed interest but hesitated due to concerns about costs or practicality.

Opportunity: To support this group, Vet Sustain could offer simple, low-cost "starter" initiatives and emphasize incremental changes. Clear business cases showing cost savings and efficiency improvements could help move them toward action.

3. Preparation (Getting Ready): Participants in this stage are actively planning to implement sustainability initiatives but may need further support. Many survey respondents indicated they had begun researching sustainable practices, attended webinars, or joined Vet Sustain working groups but had yet to make significant changes. Barriers identified included a need for leadership support, better tools, and practical guidance.

Opportunity: Vet Sustain could provide more tailored action plans, toolkits, and mentorship opportunities to help these individuals transition to the action stage. Resources like the carbon calculator and checklists have been helpful, but more personalized support could increase readiness.

4. Action (Making Changes): This group has started implementing sustainable practices in their work. Survey and interview data revealed numerous examples, such as reducing single-use plastics, improving waste management, and using the carbon calculator to identify and act on areas of change. Many participants also highlighted the impact of Vet Sustain's carbon literacy training, which empowered them to lead initiatives like forming green groups or advocating for policy changes within their organizations.

Opportunity: Vet Sustain should continue to support these individuals with resources, recognition, and community engagement to reinforce positive behaviours. Highlighting these success stories can also inspire those in earlier stages.

5. Maintenance (Sustaining Change): Some participants have reached the maintenance stage, having integrated sustainable practices into their daily routines and influencing others. Interviewees described how they not only maintained changes but also experienced a ripple effect, promoting sustainability within their networks, practices, and communities. Examples include participating in policy discussions, mentoring others, and leading educational initiatives.

Opportunity: Vet Sustain can focus on sustaining engagement by fostering communities of practice, offering advanced training, and providing leadership opportunities. Continued recognition and support can help prevent relapse and encourage long-term commitment.

By aligning strategies to these stages, Vet Sustain can tailor its outreach and resources to meet stakeholders where they are in their sustainability journey.

5.4.3 Processes of change

Delving a little deeper into the use of this model we can consider how to support the process of change through the stages, and to reduce relapse, people need to learn from their own experiences and from others. The 'processes of change' enable and inspire progress through the stages. Please note that there are many options for each process, therefore the examples given are not exhaustive. According to Michie et al. (2014) the processes include the following – note that these have not been linked to Vet Sustain's work yet but are provided as an example of what more in-depth application of the model could cover.

- **Consciousness raising:** Raising awareness about the problem, encouraging the person to seek information, and supporting them to improve how they observe and interpret information about and

related to the behaviour. This is relevant for facilitating the process from precontemplation to contemplation.

- **Dramatic relief:** Communicating about their feelings regarding the problem behaviour and the possible solutions. This can be a facilitator between precontemplation and contemplation.
- **Environmental re-evaluation:** Rational and emotional consideration of how the situation might be better if they change their behaviour; supports the move between precontemplation and contemplation.
- **Self-re-evaluation:** How the person assesses themselves mentally and emotionally in relation to their view of themselves regarding the problem behaviour – this facilitates moving between contemplation and preparation.
- **Self-liberation:** An individual's self-belief in their capability to change, and their commitment to take action; this facilitates between preparation and action.
- **Helping relationships:** These are supportive relationships built on "openness, trust and empathy" (Michie et al., 2014, p. 449), that relate to the problem and solution behaviours; they facilitate between action and maintenance.
- **Counter conditioning:** Changing and adopting the new positive behaviour and replacing the problem behaviour; this facilitates movement from action to maintenance;
- **Stimulus control:** Changing the environmental context to reduce the cue to the problem behaviour and encourage a cue to the positive behaviour; this facilitates the move from action to maintenance.
- **Reinforcement management:** This relates to a person being rewarded for doing the desired behaviour, or punished for not doing it, and facilitates the move between action and maintenance.
- **Social liberation:** According to Michie et al. (2014, p. 449) "Noticing social, policy or environmental changes that facilitate [... positive ...] behaviour change".

Other influences to consider regarding the move from stage to stage, and overall, when examining factors, antecedents, and drivers, are decisional balance and self-efficacy.

- **Decisional balance:** This relates to weighing up the pros and cons of change and is useful in the move to action. Care must be taken to use this at the right time, as if used with an ambivalent person it might be likely to encourage them to move towards sustaining the behaviour rather than changing it (Miller and Rollnick, 2013), for example if there appears to be more cons than pros.
- **Self-efficacy:** This is a person's belief in their capability to perform the behaviour in different contexts. It is relevant to changing the behaviour and the compulsion to carry on performing the problem behaviour. Therefore, self-efficacy levels affect the effectiveness of the processes of change at the different stages, and compulsion to do the problem behaviour affects relapse. As the person moves from precontemplation through the stages towards action and maintenance, their self-efficacy levels change. Someone in precontemplation might have low self-efficacy and be tempted to do the problem behaviour, however, in contrast when someone reaches the action stage the two are in balance (self-efficacy and compulsion). With time, self-efficacy will increase, and temptation will decrease.

5.4.4 The COM-B model

Perhaps the most widely evidenced model is the COM-B (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation Behaviour) framework and Behaviour Change Wheel (BCW, which operationalises the COM-B framework) devised by the University College London team (Mitchie et al., 2011). Applying the COM-B model to the findings from the Vet Sustain impact assessment helps identify enablers and barriers to sustainable practices within the veterinary sector and guides interventions for greater impact.

COM-B enables unwanted and target behaviours to be understood in terms of the capability, opportunity and motivation elements that together drive the behaviour and through addressing them drive behaviour change. To complement the model, the Theoretical Domains Framework (TDF) allows for the elements of the COM-B Model to be analysed in more detail.

The three components of COM-B can interact. For example, motivation can be influenced by capability and opportunity, which then impact on the behaviour, which in turn might lead to the behaviour feeding back and influencing the person's capability, opportunity, and motivation to do, or not to do, the behaviour again. The COM-B model enables the user to identify the components within COM-B that need to change for the behaviour to change. There is no hierarchy within the model, therefore, in some cases it might only be necessary to pursue one element of COM-B, but in other cases it will be necessary to pursue two or all three (Michie et al., 2014).

One of the key strengths of using the COM-B Model and Behaviour Change Wheel (which links COM-B findings to potential interventions and policy categories), is that it provides a pathway between understanding the behaviour and developing suitable interventions. The COM-B model is a relatively simple construct, and the overall approach is structured and insightful. It guides the user through the process, focusing attention on the drivers of “capacity and behaviour change”, which enables comprehensive understanding that can be applied to enacting change (Mayne, 2017).

Although this model is interesting to apply to this project regarding considering lenses through which to look at impact, if the project continues, the key use of the model would be to explore further ways the project strategy could be honed to maximise impact. Capability, Opportunity and Motivation are explained in more detail below in relation to Vet Sustain's impact assessment.

1. Capability (Physical & Psychological)

Do veterinary professionals have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to engage in sustainable practices?

- Vet Sustain has improved psychological capability through its educational resources. Survey results indicated that 82% of participants felt more confident discussing sustainability after engaging with Vet Sustain. Many participants reported increased knowledge about specific topics like waste reduction, carbon footprints, and sustainable procurement.
- While knowledge has increased, some participants still feel unsure where to start or overwhelmed by the breadth of sustainability topics. There is also a need for clearer, more practical guidance for specific roles (e.g., farm vs. small animal practices). A lack of physical capability, such as skills for implementing technical sustainability measures (e.g., managing anesthetic gases), was also noted.
- **Interventions to enhance capability:** Expand hands-on training (e.g., workshops, demonstrations) to develop technical skills.
 - Create role-specific guides to address knowledge gaps across different veterinary fields.

- Develop more simple decision-making tools (e.g., flowcharts, checklists) to help translate knowledge into action.
- Offer refresher courses or micro-learning modules to reinforce knowledge over time.

2. Opportunity (Physical & Social)

Do external factors enable or hinder sustainable behaviors?

- **Physical opportunity:** Barriers including lack of time, insufficient resources, and financial constraints were frequently mentioned. For example, practices often struggle to afford upfront costs for sustainable equipment (e.g., solar panels) or lack dedicated time for staff to focus on sustainability initiatives.
- **Social opportunity:** Vet Sustain has successfully created supportive social networks, such as working groups and online forums, fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing. However, some participants reported difficulty engaging colleagues or management, particularly in corporate practices where decision-making is centralized.
- **Interventions to enhance opportunity:**
 - Advocate for leadership buy-in by developing business cases that highlight financial and operational benefits of sustainability.
 - Provide customizable resources that align with different organizational structures (e.g., independent vs. corporate practices).
 - Encourage peer-to-peer mentoring and networking to strengthen social support and facilitate knowledge-sharing.
 - Create recognition programs (e.g., "Green Practice of the Month" (done?)) to incentivize sustainable actions.

3. Motivation (Reflective & Automatic)

Do veterinary professionals feel motivated to engage in sustainable practices?

- **Reflective motivation:** Many participants demonstrated strong reflective motivation, driven by personal values and professional ethics. Survey responses indicated that sustainability was important to 91% of participants, with many expressing a desire to make a positive impact. The carbon literacy training and success stories inspired participants to take action and advocate for change.
- **Automatic motivation:** Emotional responses also played a role; some participants felt empowered and energized by their involvement with Vet Sustain, while others expressed frustration or overwhelm due to the scale of sustainability challenges and lack of immediate results.
- **Interventions to enhance motivation:**
 - Use storytelling and positive reinforcement to highlight the ripple effects of individual actions, showing how small changes contribute to larger impacts.
 - Address emotional barriers by promoting simple, achievable actions that build confidence and momentum.
 - Develop gamified elements (e.g., sustainability challenges, point systems) to tap into automatic motivation and encourage ongoing engagement.
 - Offer leadership development opportunities to further empower highly motivated individuals to become sustainability champions.

Integrated COM-B Strategy for Vet Sustain:

- **Capability:** Strengthen both psychological and physical capability through continuous learning and practical tools.
- **Opportunity:** Remove physical barriers by providing tailored resources and advocacy support while nurturing social networks to foster collaboration.
- **Motivation:** Reinforce reflective motivation with success stories and long-term vision and boost automatic motivation through gamification and community engagement.

By addressing all three components of the COM-B model, Vet Sustain can build on their current success in driving sustainable behaviour change within the veterinary sector.

5.4.5 APEASE criteria

The APEASE criteria (Affordability, Practicability, Effectiveness, Acceptability, Side-effects/Safety, and Equity; Mitchie et al., 2014) are commonly used to evaluate interventions. This section briefly frames the findings in the APEASE framework.

Affordability: Vet Sustain operates as a non-profit, providing many free or low-cost resources. However, some participants expressed concerns about the cost of certain training programs, suggesting that affordability could be a barrier to broader engagement, especially among smaller practices or independent vets. Expanding access to free or subsidized resources could help overcome this barrier and ensure sustainability initiatives are accessible to a wider audience. Affordability could also be applied to sustainability recommendations as a whole – the theme of stronger business cases and examples needing to be developed was mentioned in the interviews and surveys.

Practicability: The resources and tools provided by Vet Sustain, specifically the carbon calculator and procurement guides, are highly practical and have been successfully used by many of the respondents to this study. However, time constraints, lack of leadership support, and financial concerns within practices hinder full implementation. Clearer guidelines tailored to specific practice types (e.g., corporate vs. independent) and more structured pathways for adopting sustainable practices could enhance practicability. Likewise, there are practical elements to consider regarding embedding sustainability principles into the veterinary curriculum and associated courses and in other elements of Vet Sustain's work.

Effectiveness: Vet Sustain has demonstrated clear effectiveness in increasing awareness, knowledge, and confidence around sustainability. Survey results show a significant positive impact on individuals' behaviours, with many participants implementing meaningful changes in their practices. The interviews provided further examples of changes made. However, the reach of these changes remains somewhat limited, often focused on already engaged individuals. Broader outreach strategies could enhance the overall effectiveness of Vet Sustain's initiatives.

Acceptability: The organization enjoys high levels of acceptability among stakeholders, being seen as a trusted, non-pushy source of sustainability guidance. Participants value the evidence-based nature of its resources and the supportive community it fosters. The non-profit status and inclusive approach contribute to positive perceptions. However, the survey in particular included calls for clearer messaging and better differentiation from other organizations, suggesting room for improvement in communication.

Side-effects/Safety: No significant negative side effects were identified. However, some feedback indicated that overly complex or idealistic sustainability recommendations could lead to disengagement, especially among resource-limited practices. Simplifying guidance and focusing on achievable, high-impact actions could perhaps mitigate this risk.

Equity: Vet Sustain has made efforts to promote equity by providing accessible resources and fostering an inclusive community. However, barriers such as cost, time, and limited access to certain resources may prevent smaller practices or under-resourced professionals from fully engaging. Expanding support to these groups and ensuring equitable access to tools and training would help address this issue.

5.4.6 Empowerment

Although not a model, another relevant concept to consider is empowerment. In a blog article Guy Winch writes "true empowerment cannot come from merely feeling empowered but must involve real world evidence of our ability to have an impact on our relationships and social surroundings." And "The process of empowerment is a dynamic one where we act, reflect, assess, and act again." (Winch, 2011). These two quotes are epitomised in this project where relationships are nurtured fostering innovation and change at not only the level of the individual but also of the veterinary community.

The Vet Sustain impact assessment highlights significant strides in empowering veterinary professionals to engage with sustainability, fostering both individual and collective agency. Through resources like the carbon calculator, webinars, and evidence-based toolkits, Vet Sustain has enhanced participants' knowledge and confidence, key components of psychological empowerment. Survey data revealed that 82% of respondents felt more confident discussing sustainability post-engagement, indicating that the organization successfully equips professionals with the tools to take informed action. The emphasis on education, particularly through carbon literacy training, has not only built competence but also fostered a sense of ownership and responsibility, empowering individuals to implement meaningful changes in their practices and influence their networks.

Social empowerment is also a prominent theme, with Vet Sustain creating supportive networks and communities that enable collaboration and shared learning. Working groups, forums, and mentorship opportunities have provided spaces for professionals to connect, share ideas, and amplify their impact, fostering a sense of collective efficacy. The ripple effect, highlighted in both survey responses and interviews, demonstrates how empowered individuals have gone on to inspire and lead sustainability initiatives within their practices, educational institutions, and broader communities. However, the report also notes barriers, such as organizational constraints and limited leadership buy-in, which can hinder full empowerment. Addressing these challenges by promoting leadership engagement and providing targeted support could further strengthen Vet Sustain's role as a catalyst for sustainable change in the veterinary sector.

5.4.7 Mechanism of impact

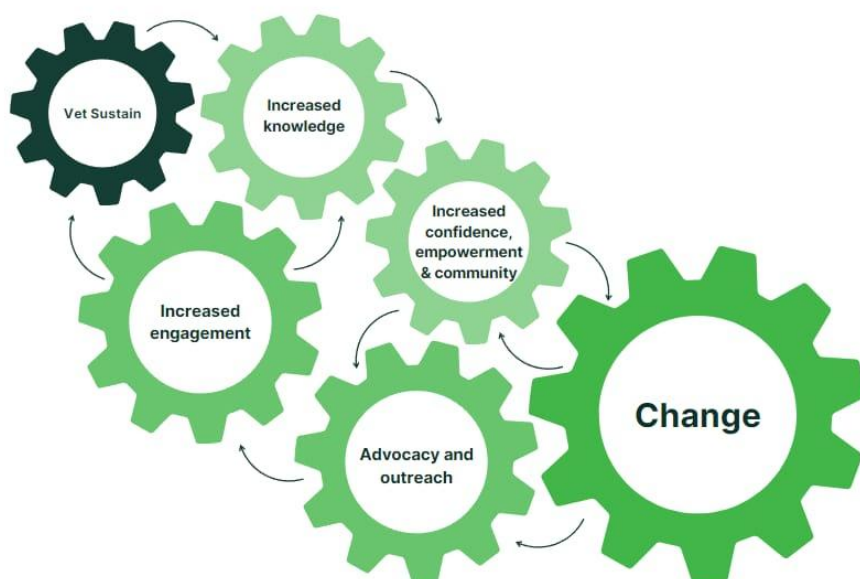


Figure 12. Diagrammatic representation of Vet Sustain's mechanism of impact.

This diagram (Figure 12) aims to depict the mechanism by which Vet Sustain has impact. Vet Sustain provides resources, courses and other opportunities for people to engage. This leads to increased knowledge, which leads to increased confidence, empowerment and sense of belonging to a community/network, which can lead to change. Increased confidence can also be achieved directly from Vet Sustain input if the knowledge is already there. The increased confidence leads to advocacy and outreach activities, which drives more engagement, sometimes back through Vet Sustain. The people 'recruited' during engagement activities then might engage with Vet Sustain and join the diagram at that point from the top or might gain increased knowledge through the advocacy that reached them and re-enter the diagram at that point. There is also a positive feedback loop between confidence and change. Empowerment could be included alongside confidence. The cogs represent the fact that Vet Sustain (small) drives change (large) through the other cogs in the diagram. This model relates to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), which explains that people need their psychological, safety and social needs met before their needs for self-esteem and self-actualisation can be met, which are usually needed for action and change. The needs are met in this context through increasing confidence and feeling of belonging in a network, which creates the environment for change. This model has been kept simple but could potentially be developed further.

5.5 Limitations and recommendations

A key limitation of this work was regarding attribution. Attributing specific impacts to KPIs is particularly challenging when evaluating progress toward wide or complex goals, as the Vet Sustain goals are. Complex goals often involve multiple influencing factors, stakeholders, and external variables that interact in unpredictable ways. As a result, isolating the direct impact of any single action or intervention is difficult. For example, broad goals such as "a no waste society" are shaped by a range

of social, economic, and environmental dynamics beyond the control of a single organization. Specific objectives such as to reach a certain number of people are also challenging to assess impact against as people could be ‘reached’ in more or less meaningful ways. This complexity creates a problem of attribution, where it's hard to determine whether observed changes are directly due to the measured activities or the result of external factors, or most likely - both. For example, although many participants described their interaction with Vet Sustain as being transformative and key in their knowledge development, there was recognition that most people gain knowledge from many sources simultaneously and therefore it is difficult to attribute some impact directly to Vet Sustain’s activities. However, being one part of the influences on people that lead to engagement and change is an impact in itself. Consequently, the use of KPIs in assessing impact may oversimplify the narrative, potentially leading to misleading conclusions about effectiveness or progress. To address this, we used a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures and acknowledge the role of external influences when interpreting results mapped to KPIs. Some factors, such as trust, empowerment and the importance of belonging to a community, were more easily attributable to engagement with Vet Sustain.

A key limitation of this study was the difficulty in obtaining a sample of survey and interview participants that accurately represented the broader Vet Sustain audience. Since the survey was distributed through Vet Sustain’s contact list, social media channels, and those of associated individuals, the sample skewed towards participants who were already familiar with Vet Sustain. Given that the majority of survey questions focused on participants’ engagement with the organization, individuals who were unaware of Vet Sustain would have been unlikely to complete the survey. Although this introduces a potential bias, it is deemed appropriate for the purpose of this study, as the primary focus was to assess the impact on those who have engaged with the organization.

Recommendations for further research and for strategic direction of Vet Sustain are included throughout the results and discussion sections of this report. Another recommendation for future research is to conduct a more detailed exploration of Vet Sustain’s audience, spanning the full spectrum from those who are ‘aware via social media’ to those who are ‘highly engaged, such as members of working groups’. Mapping this information against responses to questions on confidence, knowledge, and behaviour would provide valuable insights to guide the organization’s strategy. For example, if most of the audience are identified as being unengaged and disinterested, efforts may need to focus on increasing board engagement and raising awareness. Conversely, if the audience leans more towards individuals who are interested but require additional support to act, the focus could shift towards developing more tools and resources to empower them.

The framework developed for this impact assessment effectively integrates quantitative and qualitative data, allowing progress regarding Vet Sustain’s vision, mission, goals, and objectives to be systematically tracked year on year. Alongside additional reporting in terms of numbers (e.g., number of resources created, courses run, conferences at which Vet Sustain has been represented), this provides a picture of the impact Vet Sustain is having. The survey and interview findings add depth and valuable insight. This approach reflects the limitations of the project in terms of time and funding. A key recommendation is to invest in a co-creation process involving working group members, corporate partners, and other stakeholders. This collaborative approach could lead to a more dynamic and innovative framework, capturing a broader and more meaningful set of key performance indicators (KPIs) that might better reflect Vet Sustain’s diverse activities and impact.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this impact assessment demonstrate the significant role that Vet Sustain plays in promoting sustainability within the veterinary profession. Through its diverse range of initiatives, including educational resources, networking opportunities, and advocacy efforts, Vet Sustain has effectively increased awareness, knowledge, and confidence among veterinary professionals. The survey and interview data highlight the organization's success in fostering a growing community of engaged individuals who are actively working toward integrating sustainability into their practices.

The assessment revealed that while many professionals feel empowered by Vet Sustain's initiatives, barriers such as time constraints, financial considerations, and lack of leadership support hinder full implementation. Addressing these challenges through targeted outreach and clearer business cases for sustainability could help Vet Sustain extend its influence on a wider audience. Strengthening collaborations with veterinary schools and professional associations also presents an opportunity to embed sustainability more deeply within the profession.

Vet Sustain's impact extends beyond professional practice, influencing individual behaviours and fostering a culture of sustainability within the veterinary sector. Many participants reported making personal lifestyle changes and encouraging their peers to adopt sustainable practices, demonstrating a ripple effect that goes beyond direct engagement with Vet Sustain. The organization's ability to inspire action and create a sense of community has been instrumental in maintaining momentum for sustainability efforts. Moving forward, leveraging storytelling, success stories, and recognition programs could further enhance motivation and engagement.

Through their initiatives, Vet Sustain empowers veterinary professionals to integrate sustainable practices into their daily operations, fostering a profession-wide commitment to environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

The impact assessment framework effectively combines quantitative and qualitative data to track Vet Sustain's progress over time while providing valuable insights through surveys and interviews. To enhance its effectiveness, a co-creation process involving key stakeholders is recommended to develop a more dynamic framework with broader, more meaningful KPIs.

In conclusion, Vet Sustain has established itself as a key driver of sustainability in the veterinary profession, equipping professionals with the tools, knowledge, and confidence needed to effect meaningful change. While challenges remain in achieving broader systemic integration and policy influence, the organization's efforts have already led to tangible improvements in sustainability awareness and action. By continuing to refine its strategic approach, addressing barriers, and expanding outreach, Vet Sustain can build upon its successes and further solidify its role in shaping a more sustainable future for the veterinary sector.

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8. Supplementary material

The research proposal (including ethical mitigations, consent forms etc.) is available on request as is a PDF copy of the survey questions.