Q & A Council’s Strategic Goals

Anthea Flemming: Thank you very much Charlotte. So that was, Charlotte, Vice-President of Council, who I have neglected to introduce. Are there any questions on that presentation?

Q Unknown: I just have a question about the joint PR Committee. Is the function of the joint PR Committee for lateral communication, in other words to peers or is it for downward communication? Because my impression was that it was more for communication as the veterinary profession as a unit down to the public, but Charlotte presented it lateral, so, I just want to know.

A Charlotte Nkuna: O sorry, what I meant was that we need to connect everyone so that the message we take out to the communities and the users is consistent. So the joint PR committee that will then decide on messaging that is consistent to go out to the public.

Anthea Flemming: Okay, so we have got the lateral part of that is joining the different associations and professions and para veterinary professions to come up with a united concept which will then be translated and communicated downwards.

Q Peter Vervoortd: Anthea, just a quick question, where does the boundary now come in between Council and the SAVA? If I read the veterinary profession and para-veterinary professions Act, it is basically to control and I can read it out to you, but it does not really include this whole PR thing.

Should we not contract this PR thing out to somebody that is already doing it?

Are we not going to duplicate a hell of a lot of functions at this stage?

A Anthea Flemming: Thank you for that question, Peter, I feel like you might have been briefed by one of many councillors, we had this discussion a thousand times. Clive is going to answer, but I am just going to give a short answer. We debated a lot, we try very hard not to step outside our mandate and I think the reason why we are involved in the joint PR Committee is exactly that, so that we do not take on a role that we should not be taking on. That we give input but promoting of the profession beyond a certain point is taken up by the associations, but I think Clive was itching to say something as well.

A Clive Marwick: Peter, yes, thank you for that question. I think the line is grey to a large extent, because they do definitely overlap and one must remember that one of the core functions of Council is, is to make sure that all your professions can operate efficiently. We cannot have a public relations exercise to handle that, then it becomes very difficult.
And where does your public relations stop? Does it stop just here in South Africa, or do we look at the rest of the continent? Do we want to be isolated and just look at South African issues?

Would we like to see a harmonious sort of relationship between the statutory bodies, between the learning facilities and do we take this further to have more impact at higher level when we go to the world veterinary association, get sort of attendance at the OIE and to make sure that South Africa's voice is heard.

So it is a continual public relations exercise, perhaps not as you were thinking public relations, but perhaps on another level. Thank you.

Anthea Flemming: But this is your hobby horse, okay, go?

Q Clive Marwick: I think we must be honest about this and the way that I perceive it is that there is a general perception that Council represents all professionals and nobody else does. There is no association that can fulfil that role at the moment, because of not being representative of everybody.

So there is still a debate about this, because that is the solution, that is my question, is it the solution for Council to become more involved in that role, because of the lack of inclusivity of any other body?

Q Anthea Flemming: That is a very good question, and I would really love for anyone else who has an opinion to volunteer it at this point, because we debate it often at Council, like every meeting. When the point comes up we are like is it not in the mandate, what is our job, what should we not be doing? So what do other people think? In terms of promoting the professions, how far does Council's mandate reach?

Q Pieter Vervoordt: I think you know where you are blurring the lines and you are greying it, you are a body that disciplines veterinarians as well and that is where Council has been seen as being you know what it does. Now you are promoting the profession, which I think is great. All I am saying is, should we not be contracting that out to somebody else to do on our behalf instead of just saying well we are going to be duplicating what other bodies are also doing.

Because it is going to become a duplication thing, if we do no have a very, very good structure in place to make sure that we are not duplicating anything. And this is one of the problems in South Africa at the moment. Everybody is duplicating what other people are doing and we are not managing to actually get the message across as one message.

A Anthea Flemming: Yes, Peter, I agree with you and I think, as I said that is why I think we are involved in this joint PR Committee. So that we do not duplicate, so that we all come together and see what the offerings are and I think potentially at the moment, because there are gaps in
representation that Council's position on that PR Committee can be to fill in the gaps that are not represented by other bodies.

I do want to just say though, that as well as being a disciplinary body our job is to try and make sure that we get veterinary services out there for all and so there is an element of promoting the profession in that, because we cannot, people cannot get veterinary services if they do not know what they are and they do not know that they exist.

So we need to bear in mind that part of our mandate is to make sure that people are aware of what is available and to make sure that we can get people into those areas. So it is unfortunately, it really is not a cut and dry line, but I would like to just encourage everybody to say that first of all we really do value input and would welcome it at any point.

And second of all it is something that we think about all the time. Is that what are we doing and there is talk later on about the budget and so on and where we are spending the money, and we really do think about it. We really do think about it. We do not sort of go, O, what a lovely idea, let us make a DVD promoting small animal vets in Rivonia, which I would quite like, because that would work for me.

But we do not do that. We go, hang on a minute, that is not in the mandate, that is not promoting the whole profession or that is not creating access to veterinary services for all. So we do look at what our vision and our mission are, and we try and make sure that whenever we are doing something it falls within our mandate.

That said it is not a nice little rectangle which would work very nicely for us. The lines are not easy to see and as pointed out, there are gaps, so we need to fill them some way, but I think the point that I would like for you to take home is that we are very, very cognisant of stepping over the line and we do not want to.

Q Unknown: Just one more comment, sorry, this is going to expose my ignorance over here. But what is the joint PR Committee?

A Anthea Flemming: So, it is a committee made up of representatives from different areas, SAVA, Council, and the Faculty of Veterinary Science, UP, initially. So at the moment there is a real lack of representation there for the para-veterinary professionals, which we need to address and that is one of the reasons that Council is there to say well, let us not forget the rest of the team, but that – I think and it came about a very long time ago, it came about when I was at SAVA I think, where the discussion was let us not duplicate everything, let us try and do something together. Does that answer the question?

Cornelia Gerstenberg: As you all know I work at DAFF, but this is my personal opinion, this is not a DAFF opinion. I think we need to be very careful of defining roles of the different bodies in the veterinary profession.
Internationally you are fully aware of the performance of veterinary services, evaluation that was done by the OIE.

Internationally if we present ourselves as a country, as a veterinary service internationally there is one central point that goes through and that is the Chief Veterinary Officer who sits in the Department of Agriculture. It is not Council, it is not the SAVA, it is not any of the other bodies, and that was done on purpose, because the Chief Veterinary Officer is responsible for veterinary services not only in a technical capacity, professional veterinary technical capacity, but also in a political capacity.

So, that is how it works internationally at the moment. Now I am not saying that, that means all the other bodies are subordinate, but I think what this discussion shows is that we need to have a discussion of the veterinary services, all members as to which role which bodies plays. The PR Committee that you mentioned just now, I am not saying it is right or wrong, but I have a huge concern, if DAFF and the Chief Veterinary Officer should be represented on that, because he has to represent veterinary services internationally.

When it comes to our trade, when it comes to our veterinary services, in any aspect, he has to represent it, and I think also informal communication with people, I think that is the conflict that is arising. The PR as well, I mean what I hear now, at the end of the day there is a cost to this and the question is where should that cost come from? Where does that money come from? Does it come from Council, does it come from DAFF, does it come from a different organisation, how do they work together?

So I honestly think my message would be that we need to seriously debate what role the different bodies play. We also need to seriously debate the communication pathways that we choose, and that is a different topic now that I am talking about. Working for government, I come from Academia, and I always wondered why people did not implement and did not see all these wonderful things academics invented.

When I joined government I realised why. It is because as a matter of fact no one really knows about it, but also many of the things that I was doing as an academic did not mean anything to the public. My consumers did not even want that, they wanted something totally different, but I did not talk to them.

And when it comes to channels of communications from DAFF we use types of channels of communication. You all know we have just gone out on the brucellosis discussion document. We go out on public consultation. It is a law in South Africa, we have to do it.

That public consultation goes out via Government Gazette. It gives us possibly, if we are lucky 30% of the input that we require as government to set a policy that does not make fools of ourselves. The rest of the inputs
come, because we go out, we have to make the policy, we go out, we select certain stakeholders for the experience, their involvement and we have formal and informal discussions with them, to find out what is happening in the industry, how it is happening, what can be done, what cannot be done?

And so it is a very active process. I often hear people complaining. We do it in government. We send it out for public consultation and no one comments. I know that, that is more our fault and more a fault of the system than anything else. People if they generally asked will not comment, but if you ask someone personally, because of their experience and their exposure you will come get very interesting inputs.

And I think that is another thing from the PR Committee from communication that we need to explore, is the different avenues of communication and you have to be very careful, because you cannot be seen to be bias, you have to speak to everybody, but there are ways and means of doing that.

And only relying on a big platform out there with WhatsApps and these things that I do not use, is not going to help you. It is not going to get you the quality input in all of it that you require.

Q Anthea Flemming: Thank you. I think we will definitely take something out of that, that we need to look at our communication lines and the joint PR Committee.

A Clive Marwick: Yes, I can give a number of comments on that. I think the joint PR Committee is a committee that has been revived recently. It was active in the past. We had a similar committee. I think the committee was too big and then we had all the problems of getting all the roleplayers at the meetings. You had very vast and varied type of inputs and each one wanted their own sort of demands to be looked at, and I think that was the demise of the previous PR Committee.

I was very keen on getting the joint PR Committee going again, because I see a lot of good in the whole committee and we then called together the faculty, ourselves and SAVA to start the committee and to have a look at how it should be structured and I think that is it. We have only had one meeting, we are still trying to get another meeting, it just seems to be a very difficult process to get everyone at a particular meeting.

We are going to have a look at other structures, I think we are going to have to perhaps look at other ways of having representation, because I do not think it always works for the Presidents and the Dean to be on this particular meeting, because we just seem to be at different places when we should be having these meetings.

Funding at this stage is being looked at and the plan was that the Council and SAVA would be putting the funds forward at this stage and that the
faculty will be looking at utilising the university’s lecturing staff to do the PR work as the Faculty’s contribution.

There are a number of people that have been identified and I think that was the mandate as far as we got to the first meeting. So, yes, I think it would be important for other roleplayers to be there and I think that will be how we will be looking at it in the future, because we got to promote the veterinary profession as a unit. You got to promote it as DAFF being involved, we got to know how our constitution works, what the political input is, what a non-political input is and how best we can serve our population and to make sure that animal welfare is number one on this country. Thank you.

Anthea Flemming: Thank you Clive. Okay, now we are moving on.

Q Unknown: Going back to Dr Nkuna’s presentation. Dr Nkuna I just want to focus on something, insofar as effective communication PR is concerned?

Anthea Flemming: Okay thank you.

Q Unknown: At the level of parliament, we are not so much sure what masses do we have in Council to deal with the issue of development in terms of veterinary services in the country, because at times you will see that there are some reports from OIE, but whatever detected as something wrong, practice in the provinces there is no one giving attention to that.

That is our challenge. We see the Council is thinking there, you see the DAFF standing there and no one is taking that into consideration and our worry is that when you look into operations within provinces, it is quite different and then at one stage it leaves our other professional people isolated and they do not know where to cry.

So it is like I said last time to our rural veterinarians that we are worried, because there is no one attending to our issues, to the extent that veterinary services are no longer the way it was supposed to operate. We have been overlooked by somebody, to the extent that you see some persons advertise posts for people assisting, while we know that there are a number of animal health technicians who are not working.

That is our problem, and at one stage some people decided, no, no, no, we took a wrong profession. We are not recognised in the department as before. That is our serious problem. So I do not know how we can make sure that we are together as one including the veterinary services in DAFF level to make sure that our voice is heard, to make sure that input that we used to make should be considered again. That is our problem.

On the issue of restructuring the Council. Well I am not sure, because from our side we have only one representative, that is one animal
technician amongst you guys our veterinarians. So we say let us look into that and whatever we are discussing here, what would be the way forward from here to make that – so that we do not waste time coming here.

There should be an action that should be taken going forward so that we see some developments from whatever we have said here today. Thank you very much.

A Charlotte Nkuna: I will try and provide a very short answer to that question or those questions, and it is just one answer. What we try and do as Council is to have regular scheduled meetings with the various stakeholders/ parties. So in terms of parliament we do get invited, I think the last one was on the 30th where Council had to go back to the portfolio committee and discuss these same strategic goals and also issues that we may have and also how we see the veterinary team.

So the main focus of our energy now is to look at how we build the team, recognise all the participants within the veterinary team so that we then move together as a unit. For instance we talked to SAVA about looking at how veterinarians can also appoint AHTs in their practices.

We have regular meetings with Dr Mike Modisane [chief veterinary officer] to discuss exactly the same issues where in provinces we have different experiences, whether with the state veterinarians or with the AHTs the challenges that are there; and we try and work together to try and find solutions.

So your points are well taken and we do recognise that and that is why we have these these regular meetings to try and address that and I think the meeting is coming up, I think it is the 23rd with the various stakeholders.

Clive Marwick: Thank you. I think we are just going to have to stop the questions for now. There is going to be a long session at the end of the day where questions can be answered. I think we just got to structure this a little bit differently. Let the speakers in each session deliver their presentations and then we will have a question session afterwards.

Not that we do not appreciate all these questions, it is fantastic and it does give us a new perspective on what is to be done. Just one more, just to answer yours, just very briefly again about the appointment of AHTs or non-technicians roles, is a great concern to Council and we take that up very seriously.

We are in a process of interaction in one of the provinces right now, I think where a number of about forty persons appointed, that were not qualified as AHTs by the interaction with the DG and I also had interactions with the veterinarians in that area and the process has been changed.

So they are looking at redeploying those people to extension officers and then we will be looking at taking the new graduates from Tsolo University
this year which will then take over these positions. That is the process that is happening at the moment and we hope that it does get carried forward.