

30 July 2013

Dear Official Veterinarian

You will be aware that AHVLA has been seeking to modernise its relationship with Official Veterinarians (OVs) for some time, and I am alert to the fact that the uncertainty surrounding this has not been welcome. I am now in the position to give you more information regarding the way in which we will in future procure veterinary services, and also to update you of changes to the way veterinary surgeons authorised to work on behalf of government will be trained and certified.

The partnership between AHVLA and OVs has served the livestock industry and wider society well for many years, and I continue to look to a strong partnership with the veterinary profession as being absolutely essential to the achievement of public and animal health and animal welfare objectives. There are, however, many drivers for change and primarily I am seeking to introduce a supplier model that is demonstrably more effective and efficient in meeting the needs of the taxpayer, the farmed livestock industry and the veterinary profession.

To such an end, in future contracts will be awarded to Delivery Partners to supply a flexible package of veterinary services including tuberculin testing, other government-funded services, such as brucellosis testing, and potentially other new areas of work. In doing so the opportunity to enhance quality controls and to market-test the price paid by taxpayers for such services will be taken. This will replace the current process for appointment and remunerating Official Veterinarians (OVs) which fails to meet required standards of openness and governance in public expenditure.

This change will be supported by a new approach for training and authorising individual vets to act in an official capacity, with the procurement of a single supplier responsible for providing a comprehensive system of training and support, including sufficient flexibility to suit the needs of a wide-range of veterinary individuals and businesses. The aim is to make high quality training and certification easily

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accessible, including through more modern delivery arrangements which better fit with contemporary working practices. The package will also incorporate revalidation at appropriate intervals, in line with international expectations and best practice for clinical governance described in the current RCVS Code. Given the professional development or business benefits that accrue, I believe it reasonable for beneficiaries to pay for such training, but be assured that it is intended that it will be both affordable and will deliver good value CPD.

The new contractual model will better assure the quality of tuberculin testing and other veterinary services, enhancing their value as disease control tools, whilst continuing to recognise and support the partnership that exists between livestock farmers and their vets in controlling and eradicating animal disease. The key features of the new procurement approach are:

- Tenders will be invited for Deliver Partners to provide government-funded veterinary services to a clearly defined specification, on the basis of regional or national lots.
- Whilst cost and the ability to deliver a consistent quality assured service will be important in identifying successful bidders, other factors, including the provision of a responsive service and the use of small and medium-sized businesses which otherwise support a sustainable livestock farming industry and wider rural economy will also be important. This requirement, whilst limiting flexibility in the delivery of services, more comprehensively serves the wider needs of rural industries and communities.

It is expected that approximately ten Delivery Partners will be required to delivery services within England and Wales. These in turn will be required to sub-contract a high proportion of the work to businesses providing veterinary services to livestock businesses within the lot area.

The new approach to training will see:

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- The introduction of a modular 'Certificate of Competence', to be held by an individual vet. It will be gained through accredited training and assessment and maintained by periodic revalidation.
- Fully portable certification between employers, improving flexibility in the veterinary workforce, for example enabling an individual to gain certification independently and thereby improve their offering to a potential employer. Conversely, there will be less need to retain a full suite of unused Certificates of Competence as a precaution against their being needed, as training will be more immediately accessible to meet changing business requirements.
- OV panels simplified and replaced by Certificates of Competence with linked training modules.

These changes, which build on consultations undertaken in 2011 and 2012, align with AHVLA's recently published [Veterinary and Technical Strategy](#) and are part of moves towards a more collaborative and strategic approach to working in partnership with the livestock industry and veterinary profession. They also support Defra's recently published *TB strategy* which has as a stated aim the need to modernise government's commercial relationship with veterinary businesses through the introduction of more competition for bTB testing, while ensuring quality. It also supports 'TB Plus' options discussed in this strategy, and the Welsh Government's *Cymorth TB* project, both of which seek to enhance the role of the farm vet working in partnership with livestock keepers to prevent and manage TB breakdowns.

The target for implementation of new veterinary service supplier arrangements is mid-2014. Prior to this, and in accordance with best procurement practice, 'Supplier Days' will be held to provide a forum for potential suppliers to gain a broad understanding of the requirements and emerging plans for future veterinary services. They will also provide an opportunity to share and gain feedback which may be used to shape and refine the proposition before any formal procurement commences.

Suppliers Days will take place on:

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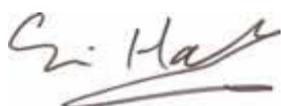
- Tuesday 3rd September (Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells, Powys)
- Thursday 5th September (AHVLA HQ, Weybridge, Surrey)

The training provider will also be identified following competitive tendering – a separate and distinct competition from the supply of veterinary services. It is expected that the new approach will be operational within the next 12 months, dependent upon the need to revise relevant legislation, an issue which needs to be more fully explored.

Further details of the procurement model, including a Prior Information Note and details of how to register to attend a Supplier Day, and the new approach to training and appointment are available on the AHVLA website at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla-en/about-us/ov/>

I would, of course, be pleased to receive your views through the Supplier Day process. What we do now will shape relationships for many years to come in a world of change and uncertainty, so an overriding objective is to build our collective capability to respond to future challenges including disease outbreaks.



Simon Hall
Veterinary Director