

Veterinary Delivery Partnership Programme and new arrangement for training and certifying authorised vets

Briefing

AHVLA is seeking to modernise its relationship with suppliers of veterinary services in order to ensure the delivery of animal health and welfare policies in a way which is demonstrably more effective and efficient in meeting the needs of the taxpayer, the farmed livestock industry and the veterinary profession.

The Veterinary Delivery Partnership Programme will award contracts to Delivery Partners to supply a flexible package of veterinary services. This will include tuberculin testing for TB in cattle, other government-funded services, such as brucellosis testing, and potentially other new areas of work, such as that described by the Welsh Government's *Cymorth TB* project. 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 This will replace current out-of-date arrangements which no longer meet the required standards of openness and governance in public procurement.

This will be supported by a new approach for training and appointing individual vets to perform statutory work. In future training will be delivered by a commercial supplier who will provide a complete system of training, revalidation and administration. The cost of training will fall either to the individual or their employer in recognition of the business benefits accrued, but this will be offset by a considerable increase in the quality of service provided, which will be more accessible and consistent and, in-line with professional best practice, will allow revalidation. It will also improve the level of support provided to individual vets and their employers by adopting best practice for clinical governance and contribute to Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

The new procurement model creates a better balance between the interlinked needs of the taxpayer, livestock farming industry and private veterinary profession in protecting public and animal health, whilst reducing the burden on the public purse and supporting the viability of the rural economy. It will do so by assuring the quality, and hence maximising the effectiveness of, tuberculin testing and other veterinary services as disease control tools, at a price which is exposed to the competitive marketplace, whilst

recognising and supporting the partnership that exists between livestock farmers and their vets in controlling and eradicating animal disease.

The key features of the new approach are:

- Tenders will be invited for Delivery Partners to provide government-funded veterinary services to a clearly defined specification, on the basis of geographical 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, and others, such as the need to provide services in the Welsh language in Wales, 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 deliver services within England and Wales. These in turn will be required to sub-contract a high proportion of the work to small and medium-sized businesses who will be required to provide veterinary services to livestock businesses within the lot region. As tuberculin testing for bovine TB will represent the majority of work currently required to be delivered by Delivery Partners, and as Scotland is 'Officially TB-free', the Scottish Government is considering how the new procurement approach may be tailored to accommodate the delivery of veterinary services in Scotland.

Efficiency will be improved through contractually mandating the use of electronic systems for test allocation and the reporting of results. For the first time it will be possible to demonstrate value-for-money through the use of competitive tendering to determine prices (on a lot-by-lot basis), and by the use of key performance indicators to improve and demonstrate the quality and consistency of the service delivered. Unlike the current process for procuring veterinary services, this approach is also fully compliant with EU-wide regulations governing fair and open competition in public procurement.

Under the new arrangements AHVLA would notify Delivery Partners (DPs) and registered livestock keepers of statutory bTB testing requirements, with DPs responsible for allocating work. Livestock keepers will have the option of establishing a relationship

either directly with the Delivery Partner or with a sub-contractor (likely to include, but not necessarily restricted to, existing veterinary practices). DPs would be responsible for ensuring contractual quality standards are met, using their own quality assurance systems, and would be subject to audit by AHVLA. Such an approach also serves the livestock industry by assuring the quality of testing paid for privately, such as pre-movement testing. This will translate into support for economic growth through exports and disease control and will also help to protect the public from zoonotic disease threats.

This approach, which builds on consultations undertaken in 2011 and 2012, supports 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 veterinary businesses in working in partnership with livestock keepers to manage TB breakdowns. This might include providing local advice, licensing cattle movements or carrying out veterinary risk assessments.

The new approach also aligns with AHVLA's recently published [Veterinary and Technical Strategy](#) and is part of moves towards a more collaborative and strategic approach to working in partnership with the livestock industry and veterinary profession.

The target for implementation of new arrangements is mid-2014. Prior to this, and in accordance with best procurement practice, a number of supplier days will be held to engage prospective tenderers in developing a detailed business requirement against which invitations to tender can be issued.

The procurement will be cognisant of the requirements of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, which requires that due consideration be given to how the procurement might improve, or might be conducted in such a way as to secure an improvement in, the economic, social and environmental well-being of the UK.

Training and certification

Modernising the system for training and certifying private vets as competent to deliver specific veterinary services will lead to significant improvements for the profession, as well as for government and the taxpayer.

At present training is delivered by AHVLA vets, to a satisfactory but variable quality, and is not readily and easily accessible; at times private vets seeking training and accreditation to be appointed as Official Veterinarians (OVs), i.e. to perform statutory duties, may be forced to wait several months before a classroom-based course is run, and may then have to travel considerable distances to attend.

In future training will be delivered by a specialist training supplier who will provide a complete system of training, revalidation and administration. The cost of training will fall to the individual or their employer in recognition of the business benefits accrued, but this will be offset by a considerable increase in the quality of service provided, which will be more accessible and consistent and will allow revalidation, and by reducing costs through the use of distance learning, simplified administration and quicker certification. It will also improve the level of support provided to individual vets and their employers by adopting best practice for clinical governance and will offer Continuing Professional Development (CPD) accreditation. Government and wider society will also benefit from greater assurance of the quality of services delivered and this will translate into support for economic growth through exports and disease control. It will also help to protect the public from zoonotic disease threats.

The training provider will be identified following competitive tendering – a separate and distinct competition from the supply of veterinary services described above. 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.

Key features of the new approach

- A modular 'Certificate of Competence', held by an individual vet, will be introduced. This is a well established concept in other professions where there is a public interest in work being carried out effectively. It will be earned through accredited training and assessment and maintained by periodic revalidation. For almost all OV functions this will be both necessary and sufficient to allow the vet to provide services to the government. Vets will be free to choose which modules to acquire and maintain according to their own needs and those of their employer.
- OV appointments are currently linked to a 'practice' which reduces flexibility in the veterinary workforce and creates administrative burdens for vets who change employer, even more so if they have multiple employers or wish to be self-

employed. This approach will be replaced by a single national standard which will be fully portable, and a system by which employers may check the credentials of their employees or contractors. Individual vets may choose to gain certification independently and thereby improve their offer to prospective employers.

Conversely, OV's will not need to retain a full suite of unused Certificates of Competence as a precaution in case they are needed. If they develop new business, for example if a client starts exporting breeding animals, then they may undertake the training immediately.

- OV panels will be discontinued and replaced by Certificates of Competence with corresponding training modules. The Certificate of Competence will be termed Official Veterinary Qualifications (OVQs) and the proposed list is as follows:
 - OVQ- ES (essential skills): Principles of certification, avoidance of conflicts of interest, health and safety etc.
 - OVQ – TT: Tuberculin testing of cattle and other species.
 - OVQ – SS: Statutory surveillance activities for endemic diseases other than bovine TB, such as Brucellosis and anthrax testing.
 - OVQ – AW: Animal welfare on farm, at markets and in transport
 - OVQ – DC: Detection and control of exotic notifiable diseases (includes work in disease outbreak response
 - OVQ – EX: General principles of international trade and export certification, a pre-requisite for the following export (X) modules. This alone may be sufficient for certain exports for which no further training is required (e.g. insects)
 - OVQ – SX. Exports of companion animals including PETS and captive birds
 - OVQ – UX. Exports of ungulates including equidae
 - OVQ – GX. Exports of germplasm including supervision of AI centres
 - OVQ – AX (avian exports). Export of poultry including Poultry Health scheme
 - OVQ – PX (product exports). Export of products of animal origin including food for human consumption and animal by-products
 - OVQ – TP (TB plus). Advanced knowledge of bTB biology and control measures.

It is expected that this list will grow as new OV services are developed to be funded either by Government or clients.