



# AHVLA News Release

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## **AHVLA announces new model for supply of veterinary services**

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

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 cost of training will fall to trainee or their employers in recognition of the benefits accrued, but this will be offset by an increase in the quality of service provided, which will be more accessible and consistent. It will also incorporate revalidation at appropriate intervals, in line with international expectations and best practice for clinical governance described in the current RCVS Code. It is intended that this training 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

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controlling and eradicating animal disease. The key features of the new procurement approach are:

- Tenders will be invited for Delivery 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 small and medium-sized businesses who will be required to provide veterinary services to livestock businesses within the lot region.

The new approach to training will see:

- 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.

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- 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 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:

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

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/>

**ENDS**

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## Notes to editors:

1. By value the most significant service currently delivered by Official Veterinarians (OVs) on behalf of AHVLA is tuberculin testing, with approximately £20m forecast to be paid to OVs in fiscal year 2013/14. As public expenditure in this area has never been subject to fair and open competition it is not possible to demonstrate the achievement of best value for money for the taxpayer.
2. Under these arrangements AHVLA has some control over the quality of the testing but systematically assuring quality would require that the individual performance of over 3,000 OVs be monitored, an unnecessary and unaffordable call on the public purse, and few sanctions are available to tackle non-compliance against standard testing protocols.
3. There is some evidence from checks carried out and incidents investigated to suggest that a proportion of OV testing is carried out incorrectly. Poor quality testing undermines the good work done by the majority of vets. It may result in a failure to detect disease, jeopardising efforts to eradicate the disease and increasing cost to the taxpayer of managing disease. There has consequently been pressure from the EU's TB Eradication Task Force to improve the quality of TB testing in Great Britain.

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