



## **Response from the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) to the Defra Consultation on Reform of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966**

**Submitted 25<sup>th</sup> March 2026**

### **Introduction and background**

1. BVNA is the professional representative body for veterinary nurses in the United Kingdom, currently with around 6,500 members - including registered veterinary nurses (RVNs) and student veterinary nurses (SVNs). We exist to empower veterinary nurses to develop as individuals and increase their impact on the profession and animal welfare.
2. BVNA warmly welcomes this public consultation, having campaigned for reform of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (VSA) for many years previously. We strongly feel that the VSA is significantly outdated, no longer reflecting the modern veterinary landscape nor the professionals working within it.
3. We consider that a modernised and future-proofed legislative framework is now urgently needed, to safeguard animal welfare and public health, and for the benefit of the veterinary sector as a whole, the professionals working within it, and the public.
4. Alongside safeguarding animal welfare and public health, reform of the VSA should also be considered in the context of wider workforce pressures within the veterinary sector. This includes shortages of veterinary surgeons, and challenges in recruitment and retention across the wider veterinary team. Enabling all veterinary professionals, including veterinary nurses, to work to the full extent of their education, training and competence, with proper regulatory oversight, will support a more sustainable veterinary workforce, improve access to care for animal owners, and reduce pressure on veterinary surgeons.
5. BVNA previously contributed to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) Legislation Working Party (LWP) alongside the British Veterinary Association (BVA), which produced initial recommendations surrounding reform of the VSA. The LWP

concluded its work in 2021, culminating in a report outlining these recommendations. Since the conclusion of the LWP, BVNA has continued to actively lobby for legislative reform, on behalf of BVNA members and the wider veterinary nursing profession.

6. Throughout 2025, BVNA championed the veterinary nursing voice as part of the Defra-led 'sprints'/stakeholder working group, also including BVA, RCVS, Veterinary Schools Council, and wider government departments. This stakeholder group was tasked with re-examining the previously developed LWP recommendations and provided significant input into the development of the proposals being considered within this consultation. BVNA's engagement throughout this process, supported by a dedicated working group made up of BVNA members, ensured that the veterinary nursing perspective was considered throughout all areas of legislative reform.
7. We also recognise the potential impact of the ongoing Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) investigation on future veterinary legislation, particularly surrounding the introduction of regulation of veterinary businesses. BVNA has also engaged with the CMA as a key stakeholder throughout its work in this sector to date. The CMA investigation has highlighted issues including transparency, access to care and consumer confidence. BVNA considers that reform of the VSA presents an opportunity to strengthen regulatory oversight, improving public assurance in the veterinary sector and businesses providing services within it.
8. We thank Baroness Hayman, along with officials within Defra, for their sustained efforts and commitment to working towards a reformed VSA. This collective work has enabled meaningful engagement with veterinary stakeholders throughout the development of these proposals and consequently resulted in this consultation. We look forward to continuing to work alongside Defra and our fellow veterinary stakeholders towards future legislative reform.

# 1 Licence to practise

## 1.1 Licence to practise questions

**L2PQ1. Veterinary acts can only be carried out by those who have an appropriate licence to undertake them (or have an exemption). A veterinary surgeon with a full licence to practise would be allowed to undertake all veterinary acts. Veterinary nurses and allied veterinary professionals would be able to undertake some veterinary acts, as determined by the regulator. Which of the following do you think should be considered as veterinary acts:**

BVNA response:

BVNA considers the below to be “veterinary acts”:

- Diagnosis of diseases in, and injuries to, animals
  - Carrying out tests on animals for diagnostic purposes
  - Giving advice based upon a diagnosis
  - Medical treatment of animals; and
  - Performance of surgical operations on animals
9. BVNA would also support the addition of anaesthesia to this list – with greater clarity over the veterinary nurse’s legal scope within anaesthetic induction and monitoring. RVNs already undertake significant responsibility for anaesthetic monitoring in practice, and clearer legal recognition of this role would improve regulatory clarity and patient safety. Although RCVS guidance already states that “the most suitable person to assist a veterinary surgeon to monitor and maintain anaesthesia is a veterinary nurse, or under supervision, a student veterinary nurse<sup>1</sup>”, currently, any lay person can still legally monitor general anaesthesia. We consider this to be a significant risk to patient welfare and safety.
10. Greater clarity is also required surrounding the act of ‘diagnosing’ – an act rightly restricted solely to veterinary surgeons – versus carrying out clinical examinations and identifying markers of health, which should reasonably be a responsibility

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/veterinary-professionals/conduct-and-guidance/supporting-guidance/18-delegation-to-veterinary-nurses>

carried out by veterinary nurses. The current framework is unclear whether this translates into 'diagnosis' and causes significant and unnecessary barriers to veterinary nurses' contribution to patient care.

11. We consider there should be sufficient flexibility for the veterinary nursing scope of practise to adapt in time, which subject to consultation may include the addition of further appropriate 'veterinary acts' in future. For example, within a 'veterinary nurse prescriber' role, permitting veterinary nurses to dispense some medications<sup>2</sup>.

**L2PQ2. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Only individuals with a valid appropriate licence to practise (or those that have an exemption order to undertake specific acts) should be allowed to perform veterinary acts, as detailed in the chapter above?**

BVNA response: Strongly agree.

12. With the exception of any **appropriate** exemptions (e.g. farmers, animal owners to carry out 'minor acts' on own animals – with clear definitions established), BVNA considers that in order to safeguard animal welfare, veterinary acts should only be carried out by those who are suitably qualified and regulated, fit to practise, plus competent and confident to do so.

**L2PQ3. Which, if any, penalties should be imposed on anyone who performs veterinary acts without a valid licence to practise those specific acts?**

*This includes, for instance, a veterinary nurse or allied veterinary professional carrying out acts which should only be carried out by a veterinary surgeon*

BVNA response:

BVNA considers that the following penalties should be available to the regulator:

- Fines and financial penalties

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bva.co.uk/media/3119/veterinary-nurse-prescribers-march-2019.pdf>

- Revocation of licence
- Suspension of licence
- Legal actions that could result in criminal convictions - depending on the severity of the infringement
- Professional disqualification - preventing individuals from practising in the veterinary field in the future
- Reputation damage by publicly announcing the penalty faced by the individual

13. At present, the regulator only has the ability to apply a limited number of sanctions to regulated professionals, with even greater limitations on their powers for non-regulated professionals. We feel that a suitable range of penalties/sanctions should be available to the regulator, to be applied appropriately dependent on the severity of the act, or the risk of future recurrence.

#### **L2PQ4. Expansion of animal definition**

**How appropriate is the use of the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 to define which species are covered under veterinary care?**

BVNA response: Very appropriate.

14. We strongly support the application of the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Act 2022 definition, in order to promote future consistency with other relevant pieces of legislation. This would also enable additional species to come within the scope of professional regulation, further safeguarding animal health and welfare.

**L2PQ5. The video you have seen shows the process for veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses and allied veterinary professionals to gain a licence to practise. How confident are you that this ensures professionals are fully qualified, are proficient in English and have not committed serious crimes?**

BVNA response: Very confident.

**L2PQ5b. If you answered “not very confident” or “not at all confident”, what, if anything, would make you more confident?**

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**L2PQ6. Currently, registered veterinary nurses can only carry out veterinary tasks if they are delegated from a veterinary surgeon employed by the same business. Should registered veterinary nurses be able to carry out specific roles, such as district nursing, without direct delegation from a veterinary surgeon?**

BVNA response: Yes, should definitely carry out.

15. Under existing legislation, this requirement causes unnecessary complications in the delivery of veterinary care and represents missed opportunities to fully utilise veterinary nursing skills. Removing this restriction, in appropriate circumstances and to carry out appropriate tasks, would promote greater accessibility to veterinary care, reduce pressure on the veterinary team and workload, and promote enhanced patient and client care, and thus, animal welfare.
16. BVNA therefore considers that employment and delegation of tasks from a veterinary surgeon **should** be separated, however there should be a clear framework for the tasks, level of autonomy, and professional responsibility/accountability for veterinary nurses working independently, or carrying out certain tasks independently. This framework should also enable veterinary surgeons to delegate confidently, with clarity over accountability, professional indemnity arrangements, and regulatory oversight between delegating veterinary surgeon, and the veterinary nurse completing the task.
17. A clear framework would enable the veterinary nurse role to be most effective whilst working independently – but also to protect the veterinary nurse themselves to ensure they are not put under pressure by employers or animal owners themselves to work outside of their legal scope.
18. In line with these proposals, we support that the regulator would be afforded the ability to determine which tasks could be carried out in the absence of direct delegation; however, we acknowledge that in some cases delegation/supervision from a veterinary surgeon may still be required.
19. When considering the expansion of the veterinary nursing role to include elements of autonomous and independent working, we also acknowledge that for the safeguarding of animal welfare, appropriate training and qualifications should be available to open up an e.g. district nursing/consulting nurse career pathway. We acknowledge this would be outside the scope of primary legislation and instead would be a matter for the regulator to consider at a later stage.

20. Importantly, veterinary nurses should not be deskilled as a result of the creation of any advanced/specialist career pathways, but instead these should open opportunities for those wishing to expand their role.

**L2PQ7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to expand regulation to include allied professionals, for example, Equine Dental Technicians, Behaviourists, musculoskeletal professionals?**

BVNA response: Strongly agree.

**L2PQ7b. What are your thoughts on expanding the regulation to include allied veterinary professionals?**

21. Allied veterinary professionals already carry out what are considered to be ‘acts of veterinary surgery’, however currently do so with no regulatory oversight or minimum training standards. There is therefore a significant risk to animal welfare and trust in the veterinary profession as a whole. BVNA considers that it is wholly appropriate for allied veterinary professionals to be regulated.

22. We also consider that it is appropriate for allied veterinary professionals to be regulated by the same regulatory body as for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses, plus veterinary businesses, to ensure these individuals are all held to the same standards and promote more collaborative interprofessional working.

**L2PQ8. To what extent is it important, or not, for the professional titles of veterinary nurses and allied veterinary professionals be legally protected?**

BVNA response: Very important.

23. BVNA has long been campaigning for protection of the ‘veterinary nurse’ title, in order to safeguard animal health and welfare, plus public health, and trust in the veterinary professions.

24. In a BVNA ‘Protect the Title’ survey conducted in 2022<sup>3</sup>, 92% of respondents to the public survey felt it was ‘very important’ that their pet was cared for by an RVN. In

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<sup>3</sup> <https://bvna.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/PTT-Report-Final-19.05.23.pdf>

addition, 91% of respondents assumed that the title 'veterinary nurse' would be used only by individuals who are suitably qualified and regulated; with 76% of respondents unaware that the title 'veterinary nurse' is not currently a protected title.

25. In the same survey, nearly half of respondents from the veterinary professions (48%) knew of an individual referring to themselves, or being referred to by others, as a 'veterinary nurse', despite not being registered with the RCVS. A latter BVNA survey identified 52% of respondents knew of the same<sup>4</sup>.
26. Notwithstanding the risk to animal welfare posed by potentially unqualified personnel carrying out 'veterinary acts' inappropriately, it is evident there is a significant risk to trust in the veterinary professions as a direct consequence of the lack of protection of the 'veterinary nurse' title. Animal caregivers deserve to have greater transparency over the individuals providing veterinary care and be assured that those providing this care are suitably trained, qualified and regulated.
27. We wholeheartedly welcome this proposal, which would also be an important foundation especially if the veterinary nursing scope of practise were to be widened in future. We also consider that the scope of practise for each profession should also be legally protected, in conjunction with their title.
28. For the same reasons as above, we therefore also consider that this proposal should extend to allied veterinary professionals coming under regulation in future.

**L2PQ9. To what extent do you agree or disagree that farriers should be incorporated into the VSA with the allied veterinary professionals?**

BVNA response: Tend to agree.

29. Whilst farriers are already part of a regulated profession, the benefits of reformed regulation means regulation of farriers in Northern Ireland (where regulation currently does not exist), and farriers being held to the same standards as other veterinary professionals coming under the same regulatory umbrella. Sharing the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://bvna.org.uk/project/bvna-survey-of-the-vn-profession/>

same regulatory umbrella could enable better interprofessional working as part of the veterinary team.

**L2PQ10. Do you think that equine barefoot trimmers should, or should not be regulated?**

BVNA response: Yes, should definitely be regulated.

30. We strongly agree that equine barefoot trimmers should come under regulation; at the very least the same regulation as farriers, but ideally the same regulatory umbrella as all veterinary professionals and allied veterinary professionals. We consider the risk to animal welfare is currently significant due to this lack of regulation.

**L2PQ11. Do you have any comments you wish to make on the Licence to Practise proposals?**

**Conditional licensure**

31. BVNA welcomes the proposal to promote fair access to the veterinary professions for those with disability or long-term health conditions. This is provided the individual can work safely; in the context of their own safety and that of their colleagues/the public, and avoiding any possible detriment to animal welfare.
32. Conditional licensure could go some way to achieving this outcome, however for those entering the veterinary profession, we feel this should be reserved for a minority of scenarios, i.e. where an individual may not be able to demonstrate all of the Day One Competences (DOCs) but could still safely fulfil the vast majority of the professional role. We envisage that the decision over which DOCs could be reasonably omitted would be a matter for the regulator.
33. In agreement with the proposals, we consider that wherever possible, professionals should be supported to achieve a full license to practise with reasonable adjustments, and a conditional license only considered if these reasonable adjustments are exhausted – provided animal welfare and safety are not compromised.
34. Clear guidance should be developed by the regulator, to ensure that conditional licensure is applied consistently and proportionately. Educators and training providers should also receive sufficient support and guidance from the regulator.

35. BVNA supports the potential future use for conditional licensure in other circumstances, as set out in the proposals.
36. Any conditional licensure system in place would need to be suitably clear to the public, colleagues and employers in order to maintain trust and assurance.

**Other comments – advanced veterinary nursing/practitioner role**

37. Whilst we appreciate this would be a matter for the regulator and future consultation rather than set in primary legislation, we see significant opportunity for the development of an advanced veterinary nursing practitioner role. We envisage that this should allow for appropriate expansion of the veterinary nursing role for those wishing to pursue specific pathways – for example, surgical nursing, medical nursing, consulting – and which could also include enabling RVNs to prescribe certain medications<sup>5</sup>. Similar to the role within human-centred medicine, an advanced veterinary nursing practitioner role should enable enhanced levels of autonomy and clinical decision making, within an agreed regulatory framework.
38. We consider the development of such a role would improve accessibility of veterinary care, particularly within the community, and therefore further safeguard animal welfare. We also consider that this approach would greatly improve veterinary business efficiency, where RVN skills are more appropriately utilised, and veterinary surgeons are able to spend more time on veterinary surgeon-specific tasks.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bva.co.uk/media/3119/veterinary-nurse-prescribers-march-2019.pdf>

## 2 Fitness to practise

### 2.1 Fitness to practise questions

**F2PQ1. Thinking of the process you have just read about and/or the video you have watched. To what extent do you agree, or disagree, that the proposed overall Fitness to Practise process is appropriate?**

BVNA response: Strongly agree

#### **F2PQ1b. Please provide reasons for your answer**

39. BVNA fully welcomes a more forward-thinking and proactive fitness to practise approach. We therefore support the ability for the regulator to intervene in the event of 'current impairment', before harm occurs. We consider this would enable a more proactive approach than the current disciplinary process which can only be enacted retrospectively in the event of misconduct.
40. We consider this approach will enable a more holistic approach to regulation, leading to greater assurance for the public, improved patient safety, and improved outcomes for the veterinary professions themselves. The ability of the regulator to be able to intervene at an earlier stage would go further to safeguard animal welfare and public assurance.
41. We also support the introduction of a greater range of sanctions which could be applied by the regulator, enabling a fairer and more effective approach to regulation.
42. We support the proposal for case examiners to be able to apply an appropriate sanction with agreement from the registrant in certain cases, in order to avoid a full fitness to practise process if it is appropriate to do so whilst still maintaining public trust.
43. We wholly support the proposal that "the diagnosis of a health condition would not automatically trigger a fitness to practise process". We feel further clarity and reassurance to the professions would be needed to outline the circumstances where a fitness to practise process might be initiated on the basis of health concerns. In

these circumstances, the fitness to practise process should be supportive rather than punitive, with an emphasis on reasonable adjustments.

44. It is also important that fitness to practise processes are timely and proportionate, as prolonged investigations can have significant personal and professional impacts on individuals involved.
45. We also consider that clear definitions of what constitutes 'poor performance' must also be developed, for express clarity of when a fitness to practise process should be triggered.

**F2PQ2. Thinking about someone in the veterinary team who is found to have a current impairment. Which, if any, of the following sanctions should be considered at the tribunal stage?**

BVNA response:

46. We consider the following sanctions should be considered at the tribunal stage, and **should also be available to case examiners:**
  - Undertakings (a formal promise regarding the actions that the professional has to do (or what they have to stop doing) for example undergoing a course of professional development)
  - Conditions on their licence (such as not to carry out specific work, or to work under supervision)
  - Suspension of their licence
  - Removal of their licence

**F2PQ3. If a veterinary professional had their licence to practise removed by the regulator, how long do you think the minimum period should be before allowing them to apply for their licence to be restored, if at all.**

BVNA response: 5 years.

47. This period of time is in-line with other healthcare regulators, and we consider this to be an appropriate length of time for the registrant to respond to concerns raised which led to the original removal of the license. We would also support there being a maximum number of repeated attempts to regain a license to practise, and for the

regulator to prevent continued attempts where fitness to practise cannot be reasonably demonstrated upon subsequent attempts.

**F2PQ4. In a situation where a veterinary professional is alleged to have a current impairment of their competency to practise (including for health reasons such as disability, substance abuse/addiction, chronic illness), what, if any, information should the regulator be allowed to access?**

BVNA response:

48. We consider that the following information should be accessible by the regulator, if appropriate:

- An independent assessment report on the professional's performance with relevant health information in relation to the individual's ability to carry out their duties.
- The professional's medical records relating to items relevant to the case.
- A letter from their doctor(s) containing relevant health information and/or assessment of their ability to work.

49. We support the need for the regulator to be able to access health information directly related to the individual's fitness to practise, but only information should be requested and provided where it is wholly relevant. It should be possible to refuse and appeal the request without this negatively impacting the investigation.

50. We also consider that support should be provided to those struggling to engage with the process as a direct result of their condition, such as reasonable adjustments.

**F2PQ5. Do you have any further comments you wish to make on the fitness to practice proposals?**

51. BVNA recognises that fitness to practise sanctions can have significant impacts not only on the individual registrant but also on their colleagues, employers and the wider veterinary team. In particular, sanctions such as suspension or removal of licence may affect an individual's livelihood and career progression.

52. It is therefore essential that fitness to practise processes are fair, proportionate and transparent, with clear communication throughout the process and appropriate support mechanisms for those involved. Employers should also be provided with guidance on how to manage situations where a member of staff is subject to ongoing regulatory proceedings.

### 3 Regulation of veterinary/animal healthcare businesses

#### 3.1 Veterinary and animal healthcare business questions

**BusQ1. Which, if any, of the following Veterinary/Animal Healthcare businesses should be regulated under proposed new legislation?**

BVNA response: All Veterinary/Animal Healthcare Businesses.

**BusQ2. Thinking about a scenario of a veterinary/animal healthcare business that has multiple premises/locations (i.e. different branches) across a number of different geographic locations.**

**Which of the options below should a named responsible person be responsible for?**

BVNA response: **Each** premises/location **AND** also an addition person for the overall central business if part of a large veterinary group

**BusQ3. Which, if any, of the following should be assessed by the regulator?**

BVNA response:

53. BVNA considers the following should be assessed by the regulator:

- The health and safety policies
- Animal welfare policies
- Staff welfare policies
- Qualifications of the regulated professional
- Training of the regulated professional
- Record keeping to professional and legal requirements
- Management, storage and usage of medicines
- Leadership of the practice
- Working environment including equipment and facilities
- Treatment of consumer/customers
- Visible information about prices
- Participation with an external mediation/adjudication service

54. We consider that in order to enable effective regulation, the regulator should be able to assess all of these areas. However, discretion and flexibility should be

possible e.g. for those operating as sole traders including many allied veterinary professionals, where not all would require assessment. The regulator should therefore have an appropriate degree of flexibility to request only the information which is relevant and appropriate to the business.

55. BVNA notes that, under the existing RCVS Practice Standards Scheme (PSS), accredited veterinary practices (~70% of UK practices) already undergo regular inspections that assess areas such as medicines management, health and safety procedures, clinical governance and record keeping. In practice, this inspection regime provides assurance across several regulatory domains that might otherwise fall under the remit of bodies such as the Veterinary Medicines Directorate or the Health and Safety Executive.
56. We consider that to avoid unnecessary administrative burden on businesses, a future inspection regime should take into account other existing areas of co-existing inspection mechanisms and avoid duplication. Veterinary practices should not be subject to unnecessary or overlapping regulatory burdens where appropriate oversight is already in place. We also consider regulators with sight of different areas of veterinary practice should also be able to share **relevant** information with each other.
57. In addition to this list, we consider that the regulator should ensure that suitably trained and qualified personnel are carrying out appropriate tasks. Assessment by the regulator would enable these incidences to be identified more quickly and effectively, taking further steps to safeguard animal welfare and public safety and confidence.
58. Whilst this may be contained within practice leadership, we also consider it appropriate to assess the veterinary team skill set when employing to understand skills gaps – e.g. ensuring the whole team are working to their collective full training, competence, skill set and scope of their role. From a veterinary nursing perspective, this would enable the team to identify where there could be opportunities for veterinary nursing skills to be utilised further, or to support the development of increased scope to veterinary nursing role. More broadly, this would also enable the whole veterinary team to work more effectively and reduce the aforementioned pressures on veterinary surgeons. We also consider that the regulator should assess the suitability of training and support for newly qualified team members.

**BusQ4. A veterinary/animal healthcare business would need to have a licence from the regulator before they open a premises. Which, if any, of the following do you think the premises must have in place before the licence is issued?**

BVNA response:

59. We consider the following must be in place in order for a business to receive a license:

- Declaration from the business that it meets the requirements of a licence
- Named responsible person at the premises
- Named responsible person at business level (if the premises is part of a larger group)
- Inspection by the regulator of the premises (or documentation for those without a physical location)
- Inspection of premises based on risk.

60. We consider that license requirements should be proportionate dependent on the size and type of the business, e.g. large corporate group versus sole trader.

61. Risk-based inspection regimes should be proportionate and transparent. Factors that could reasonably inform risk assessment may include the size and nature of the business, the range of services provided, previous compliance history, the presence of regulated professionals, and any previous concerns raised with the regulator.

62. Clear guidance should be provided by the regulator outlining how risk assessments will be undertaken and how frequently inspections may occur, in order to ensure consistency and fairness across the sector.

**BusQ5. If the regulator is concerned about a veterinary/animal healthcare business, which if any of the following situations do you think the regulator should have powers of entry to inspect the practice?**

BVNA response:

63. We consider the regulator should have powers of entry to inspect the business in the following situations:

- Powers of entry for routine inspections for business/practice premises
- Powers of entry for spot inspections for business/practice premises
- Powers of entry for risk-based spot inspections for business/practice premises
- Warranted powers of entry (from the police) for business/practice premises

- Powers of entry for routine inspections for private dwellings regarding mobile/remote businesses (where the paperwork is kept in their private dwellings)
- Warranted powers of entry (from the police) for private dwellings

64. We believe that powers of entry should be carefully considered. They must align with processes of practice regulation and fitness to practice and used primarily when there is reason to believe there is non-compliance which risks the safety of people or animals. However, we also support the need for the regulator to have sufficient powers to be able to act in the interests of the public and animal welfare.

65. The regulator should establish clear criteria and timescales for risk-based inspections to ensure consistency and transparency. For example, lower-risk premises may be inspected less frequently, while businesses with previous compliance concerns may require more frequent inspection.

66. Risk assessments should be undertaken by the regulator using established inspection frameworks and evidence gathered through previous inspections, complaints or intelligence received. This approach would enable the regulator to target businesses effectively while maintaining appropriate safeguards for animal welfare and public confidence.

67. However, the proposals note that information gathered when powers of entry are used by the regulator cannot be used against an individual during a fitness to practise investigation. This would seem at odds with the regulator's ability to be able to safeguard animal welfare and public health, by ensuring that professionals are indeed fit to practise.

**BusQ6. Which, if any, of the following sanctions and actions do you think the regulator should impose for non-compliance of the veterinary/animal healthcare business requirements?**

BVNA response:

68. We consider the following sanctions/actions should be available to the regulator in the event of non-compliance:
- Charge a business owner with a criminal offence if the business is operating without a licence
  - Provide guidance and advice on improvements

- Impose fines based upon the non-compliances and how critical they are.
- Issue an “improvement notice” of work that must take place with a timeframe set by the regulator based on severity and risk
- Suspend the practice licence
- Suspend the business licence (i.e. all premises within the business).
- Issue an “immediate stop notice” for the premises to stop work on specific activities
- Permanent removal of the licence

69. We support the availability of all of these sanctions to enable the regulator to respond appropriately dependent on the severity of the issue, the risk to human and animal welfare/team safety, and repeated or sustained non-compliance.

70. We consider that permanent removal should be a last resort. Given the impact on professionals’ livelihoods, businesses should be given the opportunity to improve except for repeated and/or severe cases of non-compliance.

**BusQ7. Do you have any comments you wish to make about the proposed regulation of veterinary/animal healthcare businesses?**

71. We consider the primary goal of veterinary business regulation should be to ensure human and animal safety, and to ensure trust in regulated veterinary businesses.

72. BVNA fully supports the introduction of regulatory oversight for veterinary and animal healthcare businesses as part of the reform of the VSA. The structure of the veterinary sector has evolved significantly since original legislation was introduced, including the growth of large corporate veterinary groups and new business models delivering veterinary services.

73. Effective business regulation will help ensure that high standards of animal welfare, professional conduct and consumer protection are maintained across all types of veterinary practice. In particular, the regulator should have the ability to hold businesses accountable for organisational culture, governance arrangements and systems that support veterinary professionals to practise safely and ethically.

74. This is especially important in light of the ongoing CMA investigation into the veterinary sector, which has highlighted concerns relating to transparency, consumer confidence and the structure of veterinary service provision.

75. We also recognise and support the need to shift appropriate levels of responsibility for business activities to the business itself, rather than solely on individual professionals. The increasing corporatisation of the veterinary sector, where many practices are now owned by unregulated lay persons, reflects the need for accountability not only for individual professionals but also for veterinary businesses and their leadership structures. We consider the proposals broadly support this appropriate shift in responsibility.
76. We have carefully considered the necessity for sole traders to both be regulated as a business and also an individual professional, and whether this could be considered excessive levels of regulation. However, in order to minimise the risk of potential loopholes within business regulation, and to ensure necessary standards are met by all, we consider that a proportionate approach to regulation of sole traders is necessary in order to safeguard animal welfare and the public.

## 4 Governance

### 4.1 Governance questions

**GovQ1. Which of the two illustrative options do you believe would most effectively serve the veterinary sector in the future?**

BVNA response:

- **Regulator with professional leadership function:** This would retain the regulator with the professional leadership function as a single entity, but an internal divide between the regulator and leadership functions overseen by an overall Board.

**GovQ2a. What, if any, benefits do you believe maintaining a single body, including regulator and professional leadership factions, would bring to the veterinary profession?**

BVNA response:

77. We consider the following to be benefits of maintaining a single body including regulator and professional leadership factions:

- Clear lines of communication between the regulator and the professional leadership of the veterinary professions
- Not having the cost of setting up a new organisation
- Efficiency of regulation and professional leadership taking place within one organisation
- Increased clarity and transparency of regulatory and professional leadership functions for the public and the professions
- Keeping post-nominals (albeit reformed) for veterinary professionals
- Maintaining the Royal Charter

78. Having carefully considered both options, BVNA considers the maintenance of a single body with both regulatory and professional leadership functions would provide more benefits than their separation into different organisations.

79. In conjunction with the points above, we consider the key benefits of a **well-functioning** single body to be:

- Streamlined operations, overhead costs – leading to a more cost-effective package for the professions – although this has been difficult to assess fully in the absence of costings with the alternative split model.
- Assurance that access to the professional leadership function will be retained

- Improved opportunities for interprofessional collaboration, especially as allied veterinary professionals come under regulation in future
- All professions having equal opportunity to input into their own regulation and professional leadership
- A cohesive voice and ease of communication between regulatory and professional leadership functions
- Pooled and shared resources surrounding professional leadership – each profession does not need to develop its own, and can learn from the experience of others
- **Enhanced animal welfare** as a result of these benefits

80. Whilst we consider a single body (Option 1) to be the most beneficial on balance to meet the needs of the veterinary professions, public and animal health and welfare, we support this model with a number of caveats.

81. We consider there remains a need for significant modernisation of the existing governance structure, and a demonstrable move away from the ‘status quo’. We previously called for a modernised and more holistic approach to governance in our response to the RCVS ‘Good Governance’ consultation in 2024<sup>6</sup>.

82. BVNA members frequently cite a lack of confidence and trust in the current governance structure, including its ability to carry out its primary regulatory activities, and often a misunderstanding surrounding the role it serves. This is largely due to the existing lack of clear distinction between regulatory and ‘Royal College’/professional leadership functions.

83. We therefore consider it is necessary to introduce a far greater sense of transparency and distinction between these functions, in doing so working towards a governance structure which instils a greater degree of trust and confidence from both the public and professions. This distinction should also clearly include the income and costs associated with delivering both functions.

84. There must therefore be greater clarity and scrutiny surrounding how each ‘arm’ is funded, the division of individual registration fees between these functions, and ensuring this allocation is appropriate and sufficient to enable regulatory activity.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://bvna.org.uk/blog/bvna-publishes-response-to-rcvs-good-governance-consultation/>

85. To further improve public and professional trust in the regulator, we consider that external independent oversight must be established, and this must be statutory – rather than an ‘option’ as outlined in the proposals.
86. The Royal Charter must be updated in order to enable professional parity – all professions having equal footing, including membership to Royal College and associated benefits.
87. If the ‘RCVS’ acronym is deemed appropriate to be carried over for continuity, we also support the suggestion of the name change to ‘Royal College of Veterinary **Services**’. However, BVNA would also support a more fundamental name change of the overall body, to demonstrate a move away from the ‘status quo’ towards a more modernised and forward-looking organisation.

**GovQ2b What, if any, benefits do you believe a proposed Split Model with a separate new professional leadership body would bring to the veterinary profession?**

BVNA response:

88. We would consider the following to be benefits of a proposed split model:
- Clearly defined roles for the regulator and professional leadership factions as an independent body/bodies
  - Ability for professionals to decide what (if anything) they want from a professional leadership body
  - Improved flexibility for professional leadership body activities that are not constrained by being tied to a regulator
  - Not having the potential for those in the professional leadership body to have influence on the regulator and vice versa
89. We would also add to this list the potential for improved public and professional trust in the regulator. The regulator’s primary role to safeguard the public and animal welfare becomes much clearer, and the body is able to focus solely on this function, rather than delivering both. There is also a reduced conflict of interest (whether potential, actual, or perception of) between regulatory and professional leadership functions.
90. Each individual profession could opt to develop its own independent professional leadership body, serving the profession’s own specific needs.

91. However, whilst we agree with the benefits outlined above, our preference remains to have a single body delivering both functions – with the caveats previously outlined.

**GovQ3 Do you believe there are any risks with a single body having both regulator and professional leadership functions?**

BVNA response:

92. **Potential confusion over role by professions and public** – Due to its dual role as Royal College and regulator, the perception of the functions and purpose of the RCVS has to date caused confusion amongst the veterinary professions and indeed the public. If this body is not modernised with greater levels of transparency, and clearer distinction between these two functions, there is a risk this confusion will continue.
93. **Conflict of interest** – There remains a potential conflict of interest (or, the perception of a conflict) between these two functions, if regulation and ‘support’ of the professions occurs within the same body.
94. **Breadth of responsibility** – The large scope of responsibility for one organisation to undertake, ensuring appropriate capacity for all of these functions – Royal College and regulator for multiple professions, with more to be added in future, plus business regulation.
95. **Appropriate skill set of Board** – The skills required by a Board to oversee regulation versus to oversee a Royal College are very different, therefore ensuring these skills can be met satisfactorily by one small Board of 12 may be challenging.
96. **Ensuring primary regulatory objectives are met** – Professional leadership functions should not distract from the regulatory function of the body, which must be its primary focus in order to safeguard animal welfare and the public.
97. Due to the history of the existing Royal College, we would be concerned that there may be a continued culture of preserving tradition rather than being forward-looking and inclusive. Veterinary nurses are currently seen as a ‘bolt-on’ rather than a profession deserving of Royal College membership status in their own right. We consider this must evolve to ensure the veterinary nursing profession does not continue to be undermined under a reformed governance structure, or indeed, any allied veterinary professionals to come under regulation in future.

**GovQ3b How could any of the risks you have identified be mitigated?**

BVNA response:

98. **Greater transparency of fees, income and expenditure by each 'arm'** – clearly communicating to all registrants and the public which activities constitute regulation versus 'Royal College'/professional leadership activities, along with clear reporting of how and where registration fees are spent, with ringfencing of funds allocated to regulatory activities.
99. **Clear organisational separation between both 'arms'** – separation in decision making between the regulatory and professional leadership activities – i.e. to reflect whether decision making is being made in the public interest (regulation) or in the interest of the professions (professional leadership)
100. **External scrutiny** – BVNA fully supports the need for external oversight of the body particularly in respect of regulatory activities, in order to provide further reassurance to the professions and public that measures of performance are consistently being met, and to provide greater levels of external accountability than exist currently. We consider this will be especially important with the addition of further responsibilities – i.e. regulation of additional allied veterinary professions and businesses. We consider this external scrutiny of the regulator should be in place regardless of whether the final structure is a single body or split model.
101. **Professional parity** – all regulated professions must have equal opportunity to feed into leadership and regulation of their own professions, as well as overall leadership and governance of the single body.

**GovQ4. Do you believe there are any risks with the proposed Split Model with a separate new professional leadership body?**

BVNA response:

102. **Increased cost to the professions** - The veterinary profession is much smaller than e.g. human-centred medicine, and therefore we would be concerned that separating the professional leadership into an additional body would inevitably

result in significant additional cost to the professions. This is especially the case for veterinary nurses, where pay continues to be a concern amongst the profession<sup>7 8</sup>

103. **Weakened or non-existent professional leadership** – Unless another organisation is clearly identified, funded and empowered, there is a danger that areas like leadership development, professional advancement and recognition could weaken or even disappear. BVNA would seek very strong assurances that veterinary nursing would not lose influence or visibility in that transition. In addition, as an already regulated profession, veterinary nurses' registration fees will have contributed to the development of the existing Royal College and its resources - especially due to the existing lack of ringfencing of fees. This is despite the fact that RVNs cannot currently fully access the benefits the existing Royal College provides. There is a risk the existing benefits of a professional leadership body would be lost completely, along with the investment that the veterinary nursing profession has collectively contributed to date.
104. **Conflict between multiple organisations** – if there is a regulator, professional leadership body and the representative body (e.g. BVNA) raising different perspectives, this could become a challenge when looking at how best to support and progress the profession.

#### **GovQ4b. How could any of the risks you have identified be mitigated?**

##### BVNA response:

105. Whilst our preference remains with the single body, with caveats, If the proposed split model were deemed to be the most appropriate option, BVNA would be prepared to take steps towards adopting the professional leadership functions. We consider this would be a necessary step to safeguard the profession and continue to ensure appropriate professional leadership continues to be available.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://bvna.org.uk/project/bvna-survey-of-the-vn-profession/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2026-02/2024-report-survey-of-veterinary-nursing-profession%20%282%29.pdf>

106. BVNA recognises that there is a potential risk that professional leadership functions for veterinary nurses could be weakened or lost if they are no longer delivered within a Royal College structure. Professional leadership plays a critical role in supporting the development of the profession, including advancing professional standards, promoting career development, supporting education and leadership initiatives, and maintaining a clear professional identity.

107. As the established representative body for veterinary nurses, BVNA already undertakes a number of activities that contribute to professional development and leadership within the profession, including education, professional guidance, advocacy and support for the veterinary nursing workforce. We therefore consider BVNA would be best placed to deliver this role for the veterinary nursing profession, if necessary.

108. In the event that a split model is introduced, it should be appropriate for the regulator to reduce its fees in comparison with the existing governance model, to reflect the lessened responsibilities from diverting some of the professional leadership functions to another organisation.

**GovQ5. To what extent are each of the following important, or not, as primary objectives of the regulator to ensure effective Regulation?**

**a. Protecting animal health and welfare**

BVNA response: Very important

**b. Promoting public confidence**

BVNA response: Very important

**c. Maintaining professional standards**

BVNA response: Very important

**d. Protecting consumers**

BVNA response: Very important

**e. Ensuring fair competition**

BVNA response: Fairly important

**GovQ6. To what extent is a professional leadership body important?**

BVNA response: Very important

**GovQ7. Which, if any of the following, do you consider to be the primary functions of a professional leadership body?**

BVNA response:

109. We consider the following to be primary functions of a professional leadership body:
- Establish specialist-specific standards above the mandatory level for specialisms
  - Profession-specific guides on activities and conduct, based on the overarching codes of conduct set by committees
  - Professional leadership, driving their profession to be the best it can be
  - Educating the public on care for animals and how to interact with the profession
110. In addition to the above functions, we also consider the following to be important functions of a professional leadership body:
- Supporting professional development, career progression and recognition across the profession, including development of advanced roles and leadership opportunities
  - Supporting workforce development and sustainability within the profession, including promoting recruitment, retention and wellbeing
  - Promoting professional wellbeing and supporting initiatives to address workplace pressures and mental health within the profession

**GovQ8. Which of the following, if any, should be prioritised when appointing individuals to Boards and Committees of the regulator?**

BVNA response:

111. We consider that the requirements for individuals to be appointed to the overall Board to be slightly different to the Committees. The individuals appointed to the Board should be those who enable to regulator to carry out its function to the best of its ability. We therefore consider the following options are most relevant to the overall Board, with qualifying comments below in relation to the Committees:
- Regulatory or educational experience
  - Professional background (Veterinary Surgeon, Registered Veterinary Nurse, Allied Veterinary Professional)
  - Lay parity (this means there would be equal numbers of veterinary professionals and those without veterinary qualifications on the Board)
  - Spectrum of skills

Additional comments:

112. In order to bring the regulator into regulatory best practice, we consider **lay parity** and **regulatory experience** to be of priority and equal importance.
113. We also consider that, in order to equip the Board with the necessary clinical expertise to make well-informed decisions, input from the veterinary professions is paramount, and therefore **Professional background** should be the next priority. Notably, by appointing based on regulatory experience first, and professional background second, we consider this should enable more opportunities for veterinary nurses to contribute to governance than exist currently, by ensuring that all veterinary professions can be held in equal standing.
114. However, we also acknowledge that the addition of allied veterinary professions coming under regulation in future will also impact upon the composition of the professional members of the Board. We would therefore strongly advocate for the permanent reservation of a minimum of one veterinary nurse within the Board composition, along with a minimum of one veterinary surgeon.
115. Veterinary nurses represent a substantial proportion of the veterinary workforce – according to recent RCVS workforce modelling, in 2023, there were 29,500 UK practising veterinary surgeons, versus 23,100 veterinary nurses<sup>9</sup>. Yet, veterinary nurses have been overlooked for some time for their ability to contribute to governance and leadership, again as discussed in BVNA’s response to the RCVS ‘Good Governance’ consultation<sup>10</sup>. We consider veterinary nurses’ inclusion within governance and leadership must be rectified in any future governance structure and should properly reflect their role within the profession.
116. Across just six professional Board members, we accept that inclusion from all specific area(s) of expertise (i.e. type of practice, species etc.) and geographic representation from all four nations, may be difficult to achieve. We consider this breadth of experience would be a matter for inclusion within the Committees.

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.rcvs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2026-02/2024-rcvs-workforce-modelling-report-final\\_0.pdf](https://www.rcvs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2026-02/2024-rcvs-workforce-modelling-report-final_0.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://bvna.org.uk/blog/bvna-publishes-response-to-rcvs-good-governance-consultation/>

**GovQ9. To what extent is independent oversight of the regulator important or not in relation to the following aspects?**

**a. Appointment processes for the Board**

BVNA response: Very important

**b. Fitness to practise cases**

BVNA response: Very important

**c. Overall performance**

BVNA response: Very important

**GovQ10. The regulator is responsible for setting fees for veterinary professionals' licences. Which, if any, of the following aspects related to fee setting for veterinary professionals' licences should the regulator consult on?**

BVNA response:

117. We consider it appropriate for the regulator to consult on the following:
- Fee levels: the proposed fee amounts to ensure they are fair and justified
  - Economic impact: to gather feedback on how the proposed fees might affect veterinary businesses financially
  - Service feedback: to ask for opinions on the quality and scope of the services that the fees will support
  - Cost allocations and priorities: to engage veterinary professionals on how funds from fees should be used for different regulatory activities
  - Regulatory changes and requirements: to update and consult on any legal or procedural changes impacting fees and licensing
  - Stakeholder needs and expectations: to understand the needs and expectations of veterinary professionals regarding regulatory practices
118. BVNA considers it essential that consultation on veterinary professional and business licence fees is meaningful and transparent. Veterinary professionals and businesses should be provided with clear information on how proposed fees have been calculated, including the regulatory activities and services that those fees are intended to support.
119. If a consultation surrounding fees is undertaken, the regulator should clearly demonstrate how stakeholder feedback has influenced their final decisions, with a full and transparent report into the agreed outcome.

120. Having a meaningful and clear and transparent consultation process is particularly important for veterinary nurses, who represent a significant proportion of the regulated workforce but whose earning potential is typically lower than that of veterinary surgeons. Ensuring transparency and genuine engagement will help maintain trust in the regulatory system and ensure that licence fees remain fair, proportionate and reflective of the services provided.

**GovQ11. How important, or not, is it for veterinary professionals to have post-nominals (as well as a licensing number from the regulator)?**

BVNA response: Very important

**GovQ12. Which approach to post-nominals do you prefer for veterinary professionals?**

BVNA response: Profession-specific post-nominals (for example, RVS (Registered Veterinary Surgeon), RVN (Registered Veterinary Nurse), RAVP (Registered Allied Veterinary Professional))

121. BVNA considers that this option offers the greatest level of clarity to the public. We are unsure of how much existing understanding the public currently has of the 'MRCVS' postnominal. There could also be confusion amongst the public who do recognise the MRCVS postnominal, if additional professions begin to use the same postnominal. There is a risk that if MRCVS were to be applied to all regulated professionals, that the bracketed titles would be lost or not referred to over time, leading to no distinction between each of the professions.

**GovQ13. Which part of His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service should hear statutory appeals: a regulatory tribunal (such as the First-tier Tribunal) or the High Court?**

BVNA response: Regulatory tribunal

122. We understand this to provide the most accessible and cost-effective option.

**GovQ14. Should appeals be on a full merits basis (decided on the facts and merits of the entire case, not just on a specific point of law), on points of law only, or a combination?**

BVNA response: A combination of the above

**GovQ15. Do you have any comments you wish to make about governance?**

123. BVNA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the reform of the VSA and supports the development of a modernised regulatory framework that reflects the contemporary veterinary sector.
124. Any future governance model must enable the regulator to act in accordance with the Professional Standards Authority principles, of being “proportionate, consistent, targeted, transparent, accountable and agile<sup>11</sup>”. In working towards these principles, and to ensure primary regulatory objectives are met, we welcome the proposed introduction of a greater sense of accountability via independent external oversight.
125. We therefore welcome the proposal that the regulator would be subject to Parliamentary scrutiny and accountability hearings at EfraCom. However, we consider that independent external ‘PSA-like’ oversight of the regulator should be statutory, rather than this being an ‘option’ as currently suggested in the proposals.
126. However, more information is required on how the Secretary of State may influence the regulator, and the extent of the ‘legally binding steers’. As a private sector under self-regulation, we would be concerned that the changing priorities and policies of each Government may have the potential to impact regulatory activities. We consider the aforementioned Parliamentary scrutiny and independent external oversight to be more appropriate, and more aligned with self-regulatory best practice.
127. We also consider more should be done to recognise the important contributions of all regulated veterinary professionals. In particular, veterinary nurses must be afforded appropriate representation and influence within governance structures to reflect their role within the veterinary workforce and their contribution to animal health and welfare.
128. If a single body model (option 1) were to be adopted, we understand that alongside reform of primary legislation, updates to the Royal Charter would also be

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[https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/The%20Standards%20of%20Good%20Regulation\\_0.pdf](https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/The%20Standards%20of%20Good%20Regulation_0.pdf)

required. This is particularly relevant to veterinary nurses who, as current associates rather than members of the Royal College, cannot currently access the same benefits that membership entails. The profession would need reassurance that any legislative change which also requires updates to the Royal Charter to be fully effective, would definitely occur.

## 5 Overall impact questions

### **OIQ1. Do you agree or disagree with the proposed reform of the Veterinary Surgeons Act (1966), and why?**

BVNA response: Agree

129. BVNA fully supports the need for reform of the VSA. The current legislation is significantly outdated and no longer reflects the structure or complexity of the modern veterinary sector. Legislative reform will provide an opportunity to introduce a more flexible and proportionate regulatory framework that supports animal welfare, public confidence and the effective use of the veterinary workforce.
130. In particular, the proposals offer important opportunities to clarify professional roles, strengthen regulatory oversight, and ensure that veterinary nurses and allied veterinary professionals are appropriately recognised and regulated within the veterinary team.

### **OIQ2. Do you have any additional points to raise regarding the proposals that you have not yet had the chance to express in this consultation?**

131. As the professional representative for UK veterinary nursing, we consider that this reform is urgently needed in order to enable progression of the workforce, leading to enhanced animal welfare, staff retention and job satisfaction, improved consumer experience, and increased trust in the professions.
132. We emphasise the importance of ensuring that any future regulatory framework supports the continued professional development and career progression of veterinary nurses. The veterinary nursing profession plays a critical role in delivering high quality veterinary care, and legislative reform should enable veterinary nurses to utilise their full range of skills and expertise within clearly defined regulatory safeguards.
133. Throughout the implementation phase of legislative reform, BVNA also encourages ongoing engagement between Defra/UK Government, the future regulator, and veterinary professionals alongside representative bodies. This continued engagement would aid the understanding of new legislation amongst the professions, whilst ensuring that new regulatory systems are practical, proportionate and effective.

**This question is optional. By monitoring the answers you provide, we can ensure that we do not discriminate against anyone with a protected characteristic as defined in the Equality Act 2010.**

**OIQ3. The Equality Act 2010 protects people against discrimination based on nine protected characteristics. These are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.**

**Do you think that the proposed reform of the Veterinary Surgeons Act (1966) will discriminate against or benefit those with protected characteristics?**

134. The proposed reforms have the potential to benefit individuals with protected characteristics by promoting more flexible routes into veterinary careers, including conditional licensure and clearer regulatory frameworks for reasonable adjustments.
  
135. Those with disabilities or long-term health conditions may also benefit from this proposed reform via improved access to veterinary care, such as the proposals which could lead to veterinary nurses being able to work independently in the community.