

Government Veterinary Services (GVS) Profession

Workforce Strategy: 2019 to 2022

Introduction

The Government Veterinary Services (GVS) profession is one of the smaller Civil Service professions. The GVS profession encompasses a wide variety of roles and specialisms and is spread across geographically diverse UK locations. It is made up of government vets with a background and formal veterinary education, who work in a range of specialist, deep specialist, policy, analytical and operational roles. A significant proportion of the GVS profession's expertise is located outside of London within teams spread across the whole of the UK.

Vets in UK government provide critical public service roles and apply their professional expertise, veterinary knowledge, skills and experience in a wide range of specialist and technical areas. The diverse work of government vets ranges from providing veterinary advice on disease surveillance, prevention and control, promotion of animal health & welfare, assurance of food quality for the general public and UK trading partners, regulation of veterinary medicine, and protecting public health. Roles include veterinary practitioners, managers, epidemiologists, veterinary scientists, strategists. Members of the GVS are employed across government and in many different agencies (including Defra, Home Office, NICS, SG & WG, DFID and MOD*).

The GVS community supports public-sector veterinary professionals and promotes veterinary policy to other vets and the public.

The UK CVO is the Head of Profession for all government vets and chairs the GVS Steering Group, who have set out their key priorities over the next 3 years, in order to ensure that the GVS is a contemporary, fit-for-purpose and rewarding profession. The GVS Steering Group consists of Chief Veterinary Officers and Lead Vets from across government and the devolved administrations. See **Annex A** for further detail.

Three Key Priorities for 2019-2022

Attract and retain talented individuals to the GVS profession

Improve the skills and capability of veterinary professionals across government to enable progression to SCS level

Improve learning and development opportunities for GVS professionals across government

*Note: Please see the separate <u>Army website</u> for details on Army Vets.

Government

Veterinary Services

How the GVS Profession is Organised

An essentially federal institution, members of the GVS profession are employed, paid and managed entirely by their departments, agencies and organisations including those within devolved administrations. Reflecting this set-up, each organisation's Chief Veterinary Officer or Lead Vet is the head of profession for the GVS within their own organisation. This federal structure serves government vets well, as it balances the benefits of having a link to a wider professional community with ensuring that vets are fully integrated into their organisations.

As such, while the GVS Steering Group can express a common position on professional standards, it does not take a collective position on questions of government policy. The deployment model for members of the Government Veterinary Services varies widely across our member organisations, each adopting a model best suited to its need: some have pure veterinary operational delivery roles, some are species specific deep specialist, others have more veterinary advice or Animal Health & Welfare policy roles. Yet whatever role a member of the GVS is in, they actively influence policy and decision making through their work.

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Government

Veterinary Services

How we work within the GVS Profession

Members of the GVS profession working in front line positions interact with animals and their keepers. Others investigate diseases, monitor the quality of our food industries to protect the public and to assure our trading partner countries. We give expert advice in disease outbreak situations and work alongside leading scientists. We give veterinary advice that influences policy in the UK and internationally and we play a critical role in the detection, definition and management of animal-related risks. We respond rapidly in emergencies to protect animal health and welfare and veterinary public health.

The modern government vet can be visiting international trading partners to provide assurance on food security or on the site of an animal disease outbreak. In both cases, they make critical decisions to ensure the welfare of animals and the safety of our food. Our skills, knowledge and expertise are grounded in evidence based veterinary medicine and fact. We undertake research to drive forward the advice and services that government requires. We provide evidence based advice to support operational delivery, and to inform policy decisions.

We fulfil an important function as an intelligent customer and supplier, linking expert veterinary communities working in government, academia and industry, and government policy makers. The applied-science nature of veterinary research jobs means we impact on the real world, resulting in improvements to disease control and surveillance activities.

We are ready to take positive action to meet the future opportunities in technology and government. It is this breadth and depth of expertise that is unique to the profession and that Government relies on every day to provide the evidence and analysis that underpins its work.

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A Renewed Vision for the GVS

Ever since the Veterinary Department of the Privy Council was established to tackle a devastating epidemic of cattle plague (Rinderpest) in 1865, Government Veterinary Service (GVS) veterinarians have proven themselves to be relevant, rigorous and respected. We are involved in decision-making across the entire breadth of government. Our ability to explain, predict and propose solutions has seen veterinarian and veterinary advice firmly embedded as an essential part of government.

Our greatest asset is our people. Through our GVS members, government is able to access the vital skills, knowledge and expertise that will protect, support and enhance the animal health and welfare and food security of our nation. This strategy reaffirms our aim to champion the Government Veterinary Service (GVS), so that policy is informed by the best possible veterinary advice delivered by the best possible veterinarians. The next few years will present significant challenges as well as opportunities for veterinarians in government and the wider UK veterinary community. The central purpose of this Strategy is to strengthen the GVS profession in government. To do this we will encourage an ever more outward-facing, influential and diverse profession with a strong veterinary capability that consistently delivers well-communicated and impactful advice.

The 3 Key Priorities for 2019-2022 are:

- 1. Attract and retain talented individuals to the GVS Profession
- 2. Improve the skills and capability of GVS professionals across government to enable progression to SCS level
- 3. Improve learning and development opportunities for GVS professionals across government

The Strategy is also fully aligned to wider civil service reform, particularly given the emphasis on achieving more with less, better use of technology, and a strong commitment to a diverse workforce.

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Government Veterinary Services

Attracting Talent



EU Exit means that the GVS profession has to be smarter in competing for the best and brightest.

The GVS profession offers some great things, but we don't highlight the amazing opportunities we can provide or advertise our career pathways as well as we could.

Key actions include reviewing how we advertise and market ourselves as employers and how we can better raise the GVS profession profile in the UK and further afield.

Attracting Talent



Why is it a priority?

As the UK exits the European Union, there is an ongoing requirement to think innovatively about where our talent comes from; the international pool for recruitment is likely to reduce, increasing competition for the best veterinary skills to work within the GVS profession.

There are 8 veterinary schools in the UK, which produced 915* students in 2018 (including international students). UK graduates only contribute to around 44% of new registrants on the RCVS Register. New initiatives** are expected to increase the UK graduate pool to a total of 1165 new graduates per year. The majority of UK vet school graduates then elect to work in practice and are not an immediately available resource pool for GVS.

Where are we now?

One piece of work in this area is the **Future Veterinary Capacity and Capability Project** (**FVCCP**). This is looking at several different areas, from legislative changes to the recruitment of vets. It is anticipated that work from this will go some of the way to help mitigate the risk to recruitment issues once we leave the EU.

Defra has developed work around an **Employee Value Proposition**, which is the non-financial offer to its employees. This highlights many of the benefits of working in government, such as flexible working, parental leave and pension arrangements.

What are we going to do?

The GVS profession is committed to ensuring we are attracting the best potential through advertising.

We have committed to working across departments to enable them to better advertise themselves and make the most of technological advances that allow us to show the wider veterinary community why working for the Government is so rewarding.

We are reviewing how well we promote ourselves, both to our internal GVS community and to people outside Government. We commit to implementing changes to make GVS an employer of choice for vets across the UK and beyond.

* Total includes 735 UK nationals, 18 from EU and 162 from other countries.

** New initiatives are Surrey Vet School, Harper & Keele Vet School, Nottingham dual intake model and Aberystwyth vet hub.

Talent Management



Why is it a priority?

The Government Veterinary Services (GVS) is one of the smaller professions in government. Significant change in the organisational landscape has reduced the opportunities for GVS members to progress up the career ladder within the profession and for senior managers to manage staff moves to assist with talent management and succession planning. Coupled with this, reductions in staff has impacted on the available pool for succession and the number of senior mentors/role models. The graph at **Annex B** further illustrates grade levels across the GVS network (as of 2017)

Where are we now?

There is an ongoing need to review our approach to talent management in order to accelerate the current cadre and fill the gaps that exist in our succession plans. An expectation has been set in the **Civil Service Capabilities Plan** that all government professions will identify and develop talent to provide **strong succession pipelines**. Heads of Profession have been tasked with proactively managing and deploying talent corporately across government departments.

The <u>GVS Talent Strategy</u> published on GOV.UK supports the identification and development of high potential GVS members in order to establish a strong pipeline for future senior/critical GVS roles. The strategy is aimed at all veterinary staff.

What are we going to do?

We are committed to developing Career Pathways by:

- Opening opportunities for secondments/loans between organisations that employ GVS members.
- Encouraging the use of '<u>GVS Technical Skills</u>' in performance management for the GVS profession.
- Highlighting the GVS Talent Strategy to line managers of GVS members.
- Raising awareness of talent management schemes such as the Civil Service Future Leadership Scheme (FLS)* & Senior Leadership Scheme (SLS)* via GVS Comms.
- Celebrating success: e.g. successful secondments, gaining a place on talent schemes, recognition for high achievers (such as the FSA 'Vet of the Year').

*Note: Civil Service talent management schemes develop talented and high performing staff from all backgrounds. Individuals often go on to work in critical business/operational roles across Defra. Historically, there have been low levels of participation from GVS members. We are committed to raising awareness of the schemes to help address this.

GVS Skills and Capability



The GVS profession covers a whole range of skills and capability needed to deliver Government services for the general public.

If we can't deliver the services, there is a significant risk to public safety. Key actions include developing the GVS Profession Network so our people can share best practice where the development of skills is concerned and connect with their colleagues.

GVS Skills and Capability



Why is it a priority?

GVS is a small profession. We need to maximise the capability of our people. Having a broad range of skills and capability and encouraging personal development ensures we are ready for any changes the future may bring, and well prepared to deal with them with our current people.

We benefit from a lot of long service and experience. GVS needs to make sure that we are not losing the significant amount of knowledge our people have when they leave the organisation, **through providing mechanisms for knowledge sharing and mentorship** across the profession.

Where are we now?

Currently there is activity going on to assess the skills and capability, and review preparedness for the future. However more work is needed to ensure GVS takes a structured approach to this development and ensure the people we have are developing their **wider skills and capability**.

There are **mentorship programmes** within departments, as well as opportunities to coach others. These programmes have not been exploited across the profession.

We think our vets would value **opportunities for peer learning**, working closely with other vets both in house and in other organisations to network, to develop skills and build confidence.

What are we going to do?

Along with the Future Veterinary Capacity and Capability Project, a number of departments are beginning to develop activities to improve skills and capability.

For example, Welsh Government has set up a **Government Veterinary Network**, to give people an opportunity to share skills and experiences with their colleague, and to better connect the workforce.

We need to future proof our profession by allowing experienced colleagues to transfer their knowledge, inspire confidence in and motivate our more recent recruits, which can be done via **coaching and mentoring**.

GVS Learning and Development



We want to make sure our people have access to the Learning & Development they need to perform at their best. There is limited cross GVS activity. We strive to increase cross cutting activities where we can to create a cohesive approach to Learning & Development.

Key actions include job swaps, loans and secondments across GVS to develop skills, improve resilience and encourage a greater understanding of the GVS community.

GVS Learning and Development



Why is it a priority?

Learning and development has a significant impact on so many different things; from business delivery to staff engagement. It is critical that GVS focuses on encouraging a **culture of learning and development** across the profession to ensure we are always trying to improve.

Through providing learning and development opportunities across GVS, we want to help shape our peoples' futures and allow them the opportunity to be part of that shaping. We want our people to have a role, and future roles, that delivers what they want, as well as meets business needs. We motivate our people, **encouraging everyday leadership** and **creating more fulfilling careers**.

GVS has a wide range of diverse, challenging and inspiring veterinary career pathways, and we need to take the opportunity to demonstrate this to our people.

Where are we now?

Currently there are many learning and development opportunities across GVS. These are primarily focused on **technical learning**, which is critical for ensuring we can deliver for the public but is not the only kind of development our people need.

Civil Service Learning provides a significant amount of **leadership training** across government; however this isn't advertised to vets specifically and there is not an emphasis on their status as Civil Servants as well as vets.

We need to ensure our people are well rounded, and we have a pipeline for future leaders. We will facilitate access to a breadth of experience, build and maintain confidence and develop wider core skills such as situation awareness, decision making, communication and team work.

What are we going to do?

Across Government there has been activity to encourage job swaps, loans and secondments for some time. So far this has been limited. Over the next 12 months this activity will be encouraged. Some organisations are already leading some excellent, short term secondments to help improve leadership skills for their vets.

Grade distribution levels across the GVS network is illustrated at **Annex B**.

Once some of this activity has progressed and we can review the lessons identified, GVS hopes to roll out other initiatives and encourage more cross government job swapping opportunities to help develop our people.

12 Month Action Plan



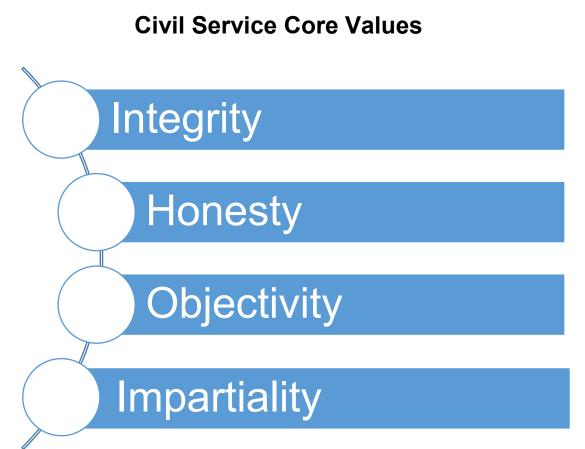
Veterinary Services

Work stream	Activity	Completion Date	Lead Department
Future Veterinary Capacity & Capability Project (FVCCP)	Joint project with veterinary stakeholders aimed at improving long term veterinary capacity. Made up of five themes: Legislation, Retention, Wellbeing & Diversity, Recruitment, Workforce Analysis and Education, Training & Skills.	Ongoing (post EU Exit)	Defra
WG Veterinary Network (WGVN)	Network generated for vets across Wales to encourage mentoring, coaching and the breaking down of barriers across the profession.	Ongoing	WG
Job Swaps	2-way loan of staff between Welsh Government and APHA. Phase 1: 6 x G7 vets loaned to APHA. Phase 2: 4 x G7 vets loaned to WG (2 now successfully recruited to WG).	Complete	WG/APHA
Loans and Secondment examples	 6 x Export SEO Vet roles available to vets from contracted Service Delivery Partner. 2-week long secondments to VENDU available to SEO-level APHA field vets. 12 month EU-Exit secondment to CVO Office available to APHA field vets. 4-6 month secondments in Home Office to improve leadership skills (e.g. policy areas). 	Complete Ongoing Ongoing Ongoing	FSA APHA/VENDU APHA/CVO Home Office
Job Shadowing examples	Government vets and external vets/vet students are able to shadow the UK CVO for a day.	Continuous rolling list	UK CVO Office
GVS Steering Group	Review this group annually via its ToRs to ensure it supports the delivery of workforce planning to benefit vets in Government. Publish ToRs on GVS pages on GOV.UK Invite G7 vets to observe at GVS SG meetings.	ToR agreed (Jul 2019) Ongoing	Defra All
GVS Branding & Comms	HR lead on developing robust GVS branding [*] . GVS work on online presence, positioning in wider veterinary community and as a Civil Service profession. Projects include improving GVS comms, links between GVS organisations, greater engagement with AGV and wider veterinary networks, establishment on CS Recruitment pages. (*Note: Branding on hold for 2019 due to prioritisation of APHA branding)	Ongoing – projects will develop over the 3 years.	Defra

The Future of GVS: Our GVS Professionals



- will continue their excellent and worthwhile work.
- will maintain and further their technical skills.
- will have access to opportunities to focus on personal development and leadership skills.
- will strive to be engaged, outward looking, valuable members of the UK veterinary profession.
- will have access to a broad range of diverse and rewarding career paths.
- will embrace innovative new technologies and working practices.
- will embrace the core values required of those who work in the Civil Service.





Who will be the next Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO)? GVS Careers Ambition:

That our GVS professionals understand the diverse and rewarding career pathways available to them. That all our veterinary professionals have access to resources to develop their future career in government or elsewhere.

That we have highly skilled professionals resulting in excellent competition for our future veterinary leadership roles.

Annex A: The GVS Steering Group



The GVS Steering Group is a senior level, cross-departmental steering group for the GVS profession. It is chaired by the UK Chief Veterinary Officer (UK CVO) who is Head of Profession (HoP) for Government Veterinary Services in government. The board consists of HoPs and lead vets from veterinary services user organisations across government. It includes representatives from central government departments as well as devolved administrations, and other government bodies.

The aims of the board broadly fall under 3 main headings:

- To identify opportunities for synergy of veterinary services across government, and to facilitate delivering them.
- Attract, develop and retain talented individuals to the profession, as set out in the GVS Workforce Strategy 2019-22.
- Improve stakeholder and wider public perception of the Government veterinary role, highlighting the crucial contribution to Veterinary Public Health.

More generally, members of the GVS Steering Group bring the following to the GVS Profession:

Professional interest: Upholding the professional interests of government veterinarians within their department/organisation.

Ambassadors for the GVS profession: Ensuring that the GVS profession is fit for purpose and meeting the needs of its members within the organisation.

GVS Strategy: Supporting the Head of Profession in delivering the GVS Strategy.

The GVS Steering Group Terms of Reference are available to view on the GVS pages of GOV.UK

Annex B: Grade of Vets by Organisation



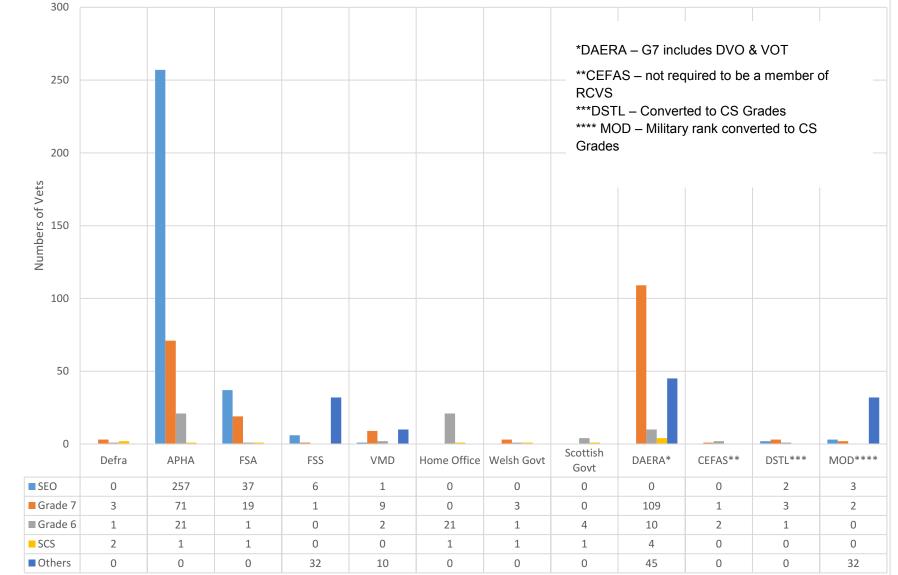


Figure 1: The number of government vets broken down by organisation for January 2020.