



AHVLA

Veterinary & Technical Strategy

‘Securing a healthy future’

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FOREWORD FROM AHVLA'S VETERINARY DIRECTOR

- 1.1** Great Britain needs government veterinary and technical services in order to protect our livestock industries and citizens from disruptive animal disease risks. It is also essential to have demonstrably competent veterinary and technical services to facilitate safe trade in animals and animal products, and to support economic growth.
- 1.2** AHVLA provides a significant part of the national veterinary service capability and we work closely with other organisations to deliver a coherent capability to respond to ever-changing threats. Animal disease ranks alongside terrorism and natural disasters as one of the highest priority risks in the National Risk Register of Civil Emergencies¹.
- 1.3** This strategy for our veterinary and technical services describes the essential functions required of AHVLA looking ahead five to ten years, to understand what is likely to change and what may be constant. This timescale transcends political changes and immediate pressures on public finances and is important because of the nature of the threats we face and the capabilities we need to maintain and safeguard our national interest.
- 1.4** State veterinary medicine is a discipline with some special characteristics:
- Government vets and technicians may consider the health and welfare of an individual animal or herd but we also have responsibilities to act at regional, national and global levels.
 - Our primary concern is often directed towards the health status of the national herd or flock and only secondarily concerned with the interest of individual animals. We are detached from the commercial relationship between a veterinary practice and their client, and any potential conflict of interest.
 - Statutory measures used in the national interest apply to all keepers so we have to provide a service even when it would not be commercially viable and when the direct recipient cannot or is not required to pay.
 - We practise population medicine through field investigations, intelligence gathering and the use of qualitative and quantitative evidence.
 - We take decisions which can have a high impact so they must be informed by the best available evidence and we help to provide that evidence through intelligence, research and analysis.
 - We provide advice to Ministers and policy-makers which is unbiased by commercial interests
 - It is essential that we work in multi-disciplinary teams that include veterinarians, technicians, scientists, managers, and administrative staff. All these people have their own fields of expertise which in many cases have been built over years of training and service.
- 1.5** This strategy has evolved from discussions within AHVLA and among colleagues within government. It sets the scene for an implementation plan which will be based on a reasonable timetable for delivering the changes which flow from the strategy. These must include developing and recognising the abilities and behaviours required of everyone in the veterinary-technical team and defining roles with different blends and levels of expertise which can adapt to meet evolving needs.
- 1.6** I am personally grateful to the many people who have contributed to developing this Veterinary and Technical Strategy and I look forward to our further work together to implement it.



Simon Hall
Veterinary Director, AHVLA

¹ National Risk Register of Civil Emergencies: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/national-risk-register> - accessed 17 December 2012.

WHY DO WE NEED A STRATEGY?

AHVLA's Veterinary and Technical Services Securing a Healthy Future for Animals and for People

Together we will create a community of trusted and responsive veterinary and technical staff. Operational knowledge and expert evidence-based opinion underpinned by core values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality will be central to our approach. Outcome and results-focused, our people will be valued and respected as key influencers and solvers of complex practical problems. They will be able to work flexibly, under pressure and in challenging environments. A future of lifelong learning, knowledge sharing and innovative partnership working will maximise our impact and protect against adverse environmental consequences. Above all we will demonstrate a sustained commitment to securing a healthy future for animals and for people.

- 2.1** AHVLA delivers animal health and welfare services for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Scottish Government and Welsh Government.
- 2.2** AHVLA works closely with other public, private and voluntary organisations to prevent, detect and control animal-related threats and often leads a multi-agency response configured according to the particular situation.
- 2.3** The state veterinary service in Great Britain has a rich legacy of achievement in supporting growth by protecting livestock industries from business risks due to high impact diseases such as foot and mouth disease, brucellosis and avian influenza. We have significantly reduced public exposure to *Salmonella* and BSE, and implemented important changes in animal welfare through the regulation of intensive systems and transport. These benefits are multiplied through our international influence helping to avoid unfair trade restrictions.
- 2.4** We have a commitment to the One-Health² initiative which recognises the links between human, animal, and environmental health. Three quarters of newly-discovered human diseases and 61% of all human infectious diseases come from contact with animals³. Indirect threats arise from food safety and food security issues and bioterrorism.
- 2.5** As leaders in disease prevention and control, animal welfare, food safety and food security we make a significant contribution to securing a safe and sustainable food supply and promoting economic growth. Our work on disposal of animal waste, residues and toxins, streamlining regulation, the provision of information and reducing the national carbon footprint reflects our concern about the potential impacts of our work on society and the environment. Operating on behalf of the Competent Authority⁴ our people have the responsibility and competence to secure a healthy future for animals and for people.
- 2.6** This strategy is complementary to AHVLA's Science Strategy⁵. Veterinary and technical functions and robust science-based evidence are fundamental to everything that we do and this is reflected in common strategic themes of animal-related threat identification, threat definition and threat mitigation. People with scientific or veterinary qualifications may develop their careers by moving between research, operational delivery, policy advice and corporate services.
- 2.7** Our vision is that we will create a community of trusted and responsive veterinary and technical staff with a strong operational science and research focus. Our core values will be integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality. Evidence-based decision-making and a focus on outcomes will be central to our approach. Respected as key influencers and solvers of complex practical problems, our people will be mindful of their social responsibilities and their impact on the environment. This strategy reminds us that the values, abilities, behaviours and commitment of our veterinary and technical workforce remain our greatest asset for securing a healthy future.

²One Health Initiative: <http://www.onehealthinitiative.com/> - accessed 17 December 2012.

³Taylor LH, Latham SM, Woolhouse ME. (2001), Risk Factors for Human Disease Emergence, *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci*, vol. 356 (1411), pp 983-989, [Risk factors for human disease emergence](#) - Accessed 15 December 2012.

⁴Competent Authority OIE definition: <http://www.oie.int/index.php?id=169&L=0&htmfile=glossaire.htm> - Accessed 15 December 2012.

⁵AHVLA's Science Strategy: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla/files/science-strategy2012-15.pdf> - Accessed 17 December 2012.

WHAT MATTERS MOST?

3.1 AHVLA's Veterinary and Technical Strategy is long term and is structured around the strategic framework presented in Figure 1. It reflects the importance of being able to adapt to new challenges while safeguarding a critical irreducible core of capability to be deployed in the national interest under the close control of Ministers.

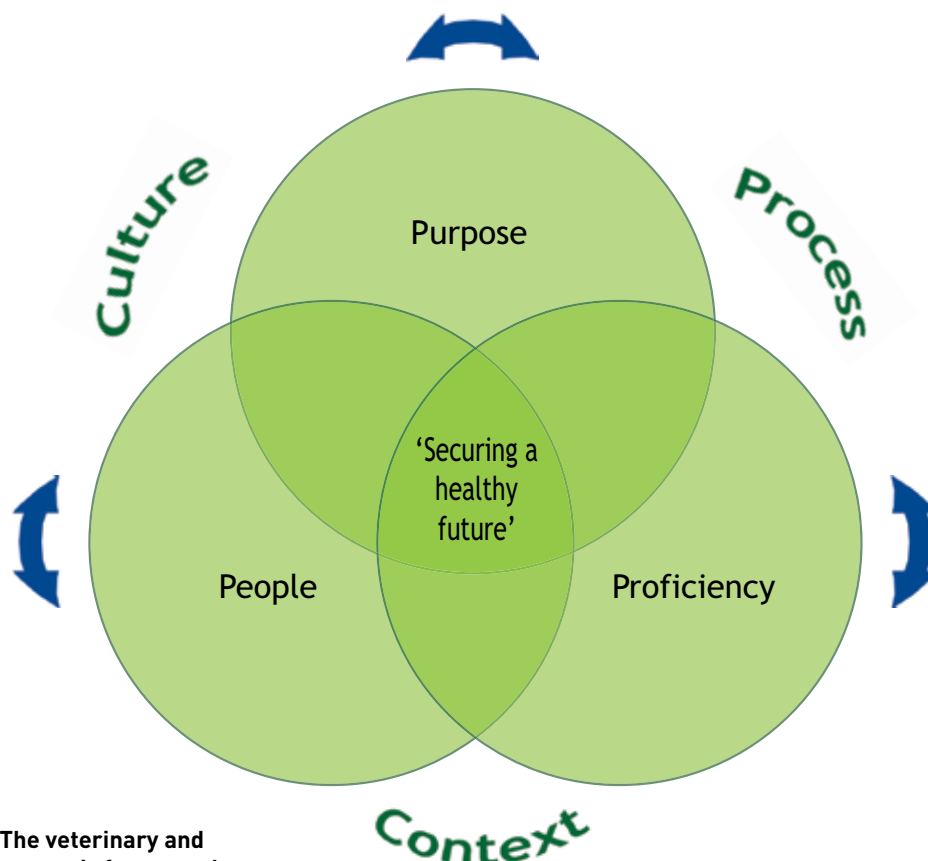


Figure 1: The veterinary and technical strategic framework

3.2 Effective delivery is about having the right people, in the right place, at the right time and understanding the context in which they operate. In an ever-changing environment we require adaptable, multi-skilled individuals, optimal control processes and a supportive infrastructure and culture:

- A high level of situational awareness to understand the full range of animal-related threats including those arising from human behaviour.
- Resilience for timely and proportionate response to known and unforeseen animal-related disease threats.
- A contemporary understanding of the welfare standards for individual species of livestock and the conditions needed to take account of physiological and behavioural needs, and to avoid any unnecessary suffering or injury.
- Robust links between policy-making, operations and research so that we can understand intended outcomes, provide evidence to test assumptions and support decision making to create fit-for-purpose policies.

WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE?

4.1 There are four recognised considerations for government intervention which help determine Defra policy and outcomes:

1. Economic impact
2. Public health impact
3. Animal welfare
4. International trade

We have consulted with policy owners and CVOs who have confirmed that the following essential functions will be required of AHVLA for the foreseeable future.

4.2 To prevent, detect and control threats to animal health: Boosting productivity, avoiding or limiting the scale of any potentially disruptive animal health event and minimising impacts to government, livestock industries and the wider economy.

4.3 To protect public health from risks from animals: Working closely with the Food Standards Agency and colleagues from public health to identify and mitigate risks from farmed livestock, companion animals and wildlife.

We deal with animal-related threats in three stages:

- **Threat awareness:** A general understanding and awareness of the threats likely to impact animal and public health both now and in the future. These usually involve bacteria, viruses, parasites, fungi, prions and intoxications. The risk can be exacerbated through non-compliant behaviour by individuals engaged in high-risk activities such as animal movements.
- **Threat definition:** Identification of the disease, disease agent, chemical, behaviour, change in risk factors such as a change in husbandry or the environment that poses a danger to animal health and welfare and public health and the level of threat that it presents.

- **Threat mitigation:** A systematic reduction in the extent of exposure to the threat and the likelihood of its occurrence. Systems for registration, inspection, approval, licence and audit must recognise the importance of shared responsibility and be in proportion to the impact of the threat.

4.4 To facilitate safe trade: Supporting economic growth while minimising the risks of spreading disease across borders.

- We carry out surveillance and the means to certify the health status of animals and animal products to assure importing countries of the health status of our animals and animal products.
- We risk assess and check imports of animals and animal products to protect our citizens and animals.
- We negotiate international standards based on scientific risk; implementing them transparently so that unnecessary barriers to trade are reduced.

4.5 To protect animal welfare: Working with our enforcement delivery partners in local authorities and others to set and assure animal welfare standards, ensuring that livestock keepers are fulfilling their responsibilities by meeting legal standards.

4.6 To provide expert veterinary and technical consultancy and advice to inform policy development, implementation and review: Ensuring that decisions are based on the best available science and evidence. AHVLA's seven areas of veterinary and technical activity and influence are:

1. Exotic disease
2. Border controls
3. Disease risk reduction
4. Endemic and non-statutory diseases
5. Protecting the food chain
6. Reportable diseases and zoonoses
7. Welfare

These seven work areas are underpinned by cross-cutting capabilities in surveillance, epidemiology, risk analysis, regulation, contingency planning and disease outbreak response (Figure 2).

AHVLA must retain and develop applied veterinary and technical skills, knowledge and experience in all these areas of state veterinary medicine.

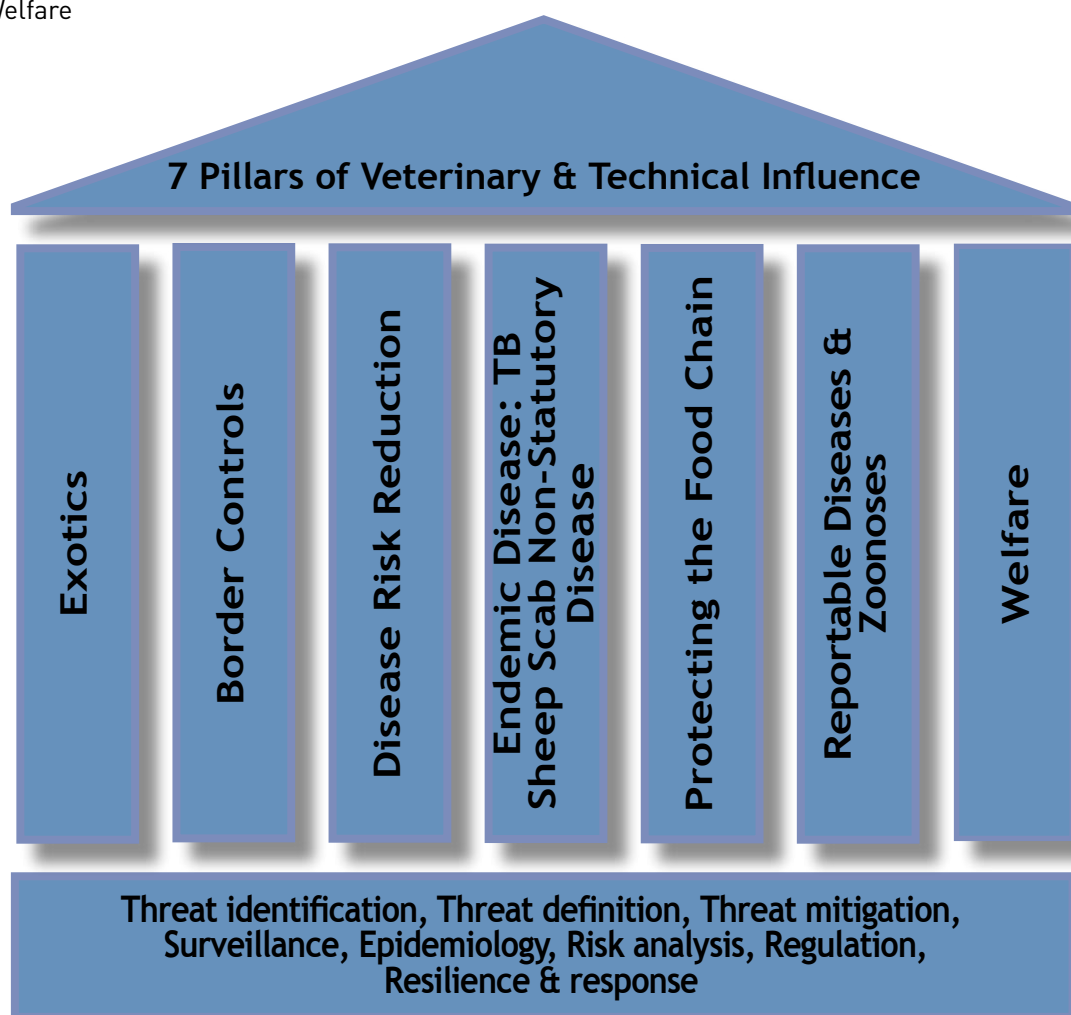


Figure 2: The seven pillars of veterinary and technical influence

WHO ARE OUR PEOPLE?

5.1 We provide strategic capabilities: The capabilities required to deliver our purpose depend on veterinarians and technicians with unique combinations of skills, knowledge and behaviours that are developed and nurtured over time through learning, practice and experience. The national interest and international obligations require AHVLA to maintain a capability for effective disease and welfare surveillance and response. This determines the size and nature and skills of the veterinary and technical team and may change over time with global threat levels and the abilities of partner organisations.

- An optimal core of staff with skills to deliver statutory animal health and welfare controls and other actions required by government.
- Initial diagnostic capability and surge capacity for infectious animal disease control and associated timely and expert advice.
- Access to other laboratory services, such as analytical capability for residues and toxins.
- A supportive organisational structure, culture and control processes.
- Field personnel to deliver statutory measures for animal disease risk mitigation and control, to enable trade and exports of animals and animal products, and to promote and assure good animal welfare.
- Surveillance to enable detection, characterisation, risk assessment and communication of new and re-emerging animal diseases, including zoonoses, both nationally and internationally and to monitor the impact of interventions.
- Provision of, or assured access to, high quality and timely evidence (specialist expertise, population and other animal related data), analysis (epidemiology including risk analysis,

economics and social science) and applied research.

- An understanding of economic operations in the livestock-based industries including processors and traders so that economic drivers can be incorporated in risk assessments, advice and interventions.

5.2 Civil Service Reform Plan: AHVLA will follow the direction of, and meet the criteria set out by, the Civil Service Reform Plan⁶. In addition to veterinary and technical competences all AHVLA veterinary and technical team members must demonstrate behaviours such as leadership, communication, decision-making and team working appropriate to their job and grade. As staff move into more senior roles, the behaviours, skills and experience of previous grades continue to apply. In order to progress it is expected that an individual will attain and be able to demonstrate the necessary professional skills and competencies at the higher grade. This will be evidenced by building a personal portfolio of evidence which for veterinarians will start with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) Professional Development Phase (PDP) or its equivalent.

5.3 Veterinary and technical job family profile: At an early stage in the implementation of this strategy we will aim to achieve consistency in job descriptions and grading for people employed in veterinary and technical roles. AHVLA's Science Strategy also outlines alternative career options for people who are able to demonstrate the required aptitude and competence. This will be a demanding task to which we are committed to providing appropriate resource. Our veterinarians and technicians may also fill general management and policy-making roles that do not list relevant technical expertise as an essential requirement. In such instances combined skill and experience in

business administration and applied technical knowledge delivers synergistic benefits for both the organisation and the individual.

5.4 Recruitment, retention and recognition:

Recruitment, retention and adequate recognition and reward of personnel in our veterinary and technical cadre will be crucial to the success of AHVLA. Effective relationship building with under-graduates and post-graduates in relevant disciplines will facilitate ongoing knowledge exchange and ensure that veterinarians and animal health workers understand and support the aims and objectives of AHVLA. We are particularly focussed on veterinarians and animal health workers engaged in our livestock and meat practices. By working together more closely in future we will strengthen our collective capability to deliver state veterinary functions.

5.5 Continuing Professional Development (CPD):

AHVLA is committed to offering structured continuous learning and development opportunities that will progressively equip individuals with the required knowledge, skills and attitudes to succeed in their careers as vets or technicians working within government. We will promote a blended learning format using the Civil Service Learning Common Curriculum (working in the Civil Service, core skills, leadership and management, accredited professional postgraduate qualifications and targeted skills, development opportunities, within AHVLA and elsewhere). CPD will need to be proportionate to both business and individual need. In accordance with RCVS guidance our veterinarians will continue to be responsible for undertaking and maintaining a record of their veterinary professional development.

5.6 Career development: The AHVLA veterinary and technical teams need a career development roadmap that achieves the optimal balance of competence (veterinary and technical abilities), veterinary professional standards and behaviours and Civil Service competencies (behaviours) at each respective grade. The aim is to attract, motivate, develop and retain the most talented people with an interest in, and aptitude for, state veterinary medicine. To be successful the programme must include active talent management and strategies for recognition and reward, flexible interchange of people and knowledge and the development of leadership and management potential.

MANAGING AND ASSURING OUR PROFICIENCY

6.1 Abilities and behaviours: Veterinary and technical staff delivering tasks and activities on behalf of AHVLA work in a diverse range of roles. The abilities (competences) and behaviours (competencies) required for these varied jobs can be generalist or specialised in nature. At all levels our veterinary and technical staff, supported by managers, are expected to:

- Self direct learning and maintain professional and technical skills.
- Apply professional and technical skills across boundaries and borders.
- Acquire knowledge and skills relevant to their role in accordance with the core Civil Service Competency Framework⁷ and in the case of veterinarians, the Government Veterinary Surgeon's competency framework.

This includes, where relevant, the development of skills and experience in leadership, people management and business/commercial acumen.

6.2 Risk analysis: We need to strengthen our skills in quantitative and qualitative analysis and evidence-based decision making. We aim to integrate data generated by AHVLA with that from other sources and then analyse it to produce knowledge and intelligence that will support government in achieving its outcomes. Empowering our veterinary and technical staff to make science and evidence-based decisions will ensure that we fully recognise the talents of our people. It should provide opportunities to develop leaders and experts in all areas.

6.3 Knowledge sharing and exchange networks: Sharing knowledge and information effectively will promote a culture of continuous learning and encourage creativity and innovation. AHVLA aims to develop an environment in which we can develop as individuals and operate effectively as part of multi-disciplinary teams. The development of veterinary and technical knowledge-sharing should create coherence and

consistency in approach. We will aim to have a shared view across disciplines within AHVLA for each subject matter area and use this to provide consistent advice to policy makers and others. We will aim to strengthen the policy operations interface by ensuring that policy-makers have access to the best-informed people.

6.4 Clinical governance and standards:

AHVLA needs to establish clear operational standards to quality assure the advice and services we deliver. A quality assurance framework, including clear standards for clinical governance, control and audit is being implemented and this should include a culture of constructive challenge. The management and appraisal of people in veterinary and technical roles must be supported and informed by relevant specialist expertise at the appropriate level of seniority. This will include accountability for meeting annual CPD requirements and application of appropriate expertise to case management and decision-making. Managers of veterinarians and technicians should ideally have subject matter expertise and be capable of delivering chargeable services in addition to being excellent leaders and people managers.

6.5 Government Veterinary Surgeons:

All government veterinarians are automatically members of the Government Veterinary Surgeon's (GVS) network. The GVS steering group is made up of senior veterinary managers from across Government and chaired by the CVO UK. This provides collective governance and leadership for GVS working groups and activities in support of veterinary education, knowledge exchange and career development.

6.6 Working with operational and commercial partners:

AHVLA already works in extensive partnerships with private veterinarians and other organisations. We will continue to develop these robust, innovative partnerships to deliver value for money and resilience in accordance with long-term policy goals, ensuring that veterinary and technical experts are sourced and deployed in the most appropriate way.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- 7.1** We want to ensure that we have a Veterinary and Technical Strategy that we all feel part of, as this is essential to building a trusted, productive and responsive veterinary and technical team. By implementing this strategy we can develop our people to their full potential and maximise our impact in making a positive difference to securing a healthy future and contributing to economic growth.
- 7.2** The next step is to produce a comprehensive implementation plan, including details of the structure, control systems and governance that will enable us to deliver the vision set out in this strategy. The introduction of our revised veterinary and technical structure and improvements to our governance system will be complete by Spring 2014. Throughout the implementation phase we will ensure that we retain sufficient flexibility to develop and adapt our strategy in response to changing circumstances and demand.



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