



Veterinary
Medicines
Directorate



SUMMARY NOTES

EQUINE ANTHELMINTIC RESISTANCE STAKEHOLDER MEETING

15 MARCH 2022

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Equine Anthelmintic Resistance Stakeholder Meeting - Summary Notes

Introduction

The VMD hosted an online Equine Anthelmintic Resistance Stakeholder Workshop in November 2021 where stakeholders agreed it was essential to adopt a coordinated approach to tackling anthelmintic resistance in equine parasites by forming a new pan-industry equine group (summary notes published online¹). Based on discussions at this Workshop and further feedback from wider stakeholders, the VMD compiled a draft infographic detailing the key themes identified for further work and a suggested structure for a pan-industry equine group (see Figure 1).

The VMD then hosted a follow up Equine Anthelmintic Resistance Stakeholder Meeting on 15 March 2022 to inform the next steps to developing this pan-industry equine group. The meeting comprised two breakout sessions focused on what the group should do and who should be represented, by considering priority themes, activities and membership, using the draft infographic as a basis for discussion.

There was continued enthusiasm and broadening interest in the formation of a pan-industry equine group for sustainable control of equine parasites, with 51 external delegates from over 40 organisations in attendance.

Summary notes of the associated discussion for each of the breakout session questions and the points collectively agreed to enable progression to pan-industry ownership of this initiative are provided below.

¹ Veterinary Medicines Directorate (2022) *VMD hosts Equine Anthelmintic Resistance Stakeholder Workshop*. Available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/vmd-hosts-equine-anthelmintic-resistance-stakeholder-workshop>

Developing a coordinated pan-industry approach to tackle anthelmintic resistance in equine parasites

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate's [stakeholder workshop](#), held in November 2021, discussed the core problems, and potential ways forward, to address anthelmintic resistance in horse parasites.

Stakeholders agreed that a coordinated approach is essential through an equine focused group, much like SCOPS¹ for sheep and COWS² for cows. The group would comprise pan-industry representation to develop best practice guidelines and prioritise key themes to guide related activities. Additional stakeholders could contribute to specific activities as necessary. This infographic details those key themes identified by stakeholders for further work.



¹ Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep
² Control of Worms Sustainably

Figure 1. Draft infographic detailing the key themes (communication, education, diagnostics, sustainability, data and research) and associated activities for further work identified in the November 2021 Workshop

Session 1: What should the pan-industry equine group do?

Q. Is agreement of best practice guidelines the most sensible starting point?

There was general agreement that development of best practice guidelines for sustainable control of equine parasites would be a sensible starting point for this pan-industry initiative. This would enable assimilation of all available evidence and highlight priority areas for further work. It was acknowledged that further research may be required to underpin best practice guidelines. Some delegates suggested that activities to raise awareness and encourage or require compliance with best practice guidelines could run in parallel to their development. For example, communication and education strategies could be established and changes to the regulatory environment could be considered. This would enable pan-industry agreement, promotion, implementation and enforcement of such guidelines to promote consistent evidence-based anthelmintic use and stewardship.

Some delegates felt that there are currently multiple sources of best practice guidance available, and the group should instead focus on behavioural change through communication and education strategies to engage with equine keepers. The group concluded that whilst behavioural change, and understanding how to effect it, will be a key element to success, it is important to first ensure that there is consistency in best practice messaging across all stakeholders.

Q. What is within scope of the best practice guidelines?

It was considered that development of particularly detailed best practice guidelines could be challenging due to the complexity of the equine sector, for example different management systems, risk profiles and species (horses and donkeys). Therefore, there was agreement that the guidelines should provide sufficient information such that the tools and principles for sustainable control are outlined without being too prescriptive, perhaps with signposting to other trusted resources for further detail. It was acknowledged that there could be merit in updating, modifying or referencing existing guidelines.

Q. Who should the best practice guidelines be aimed at?

There were differing views on whether the guidelines should be aimed specifically at all prescriber groups (vets, suitably qualified persons (SQPs) and pharmacists) or at equine keepers, or whether they should be inclusive for all stakeholders. There could be iterations of the same messaging available to all stakeholders, such as a high-level document with essential information primarily aimed at equine keepers with an additional more detailed document aimed at prescribers but available to interested stakeholders. These guidelines could be further stratified in the future to be aimed at different industry professionals. However, it would be preferable for the messaging aimed at equine keepers to indicate that best practice is to engage with prescribers to develop appropriate parasite management plans.

Q. Who needs to be involved in developing the best practice guidelines for each stakeholder to agree, implement, promote, and enforce the guidelines?

The benefits of a pan-industry approach to development of the guidelines were acknowledged, particularly for encouraging uptake and implementation. However, it was also recognised that a smaller working group of experts could enable efficient decision-making processes. There was general agreement that the core steering group could provide general direction on the guideline development, but could commission a group of experts to write the guidelines. A subsequent consultation process to provide an opportunity for stakeholder feedback was suggested to facilitate pan-industry engagement. It was recognised that the implementation of best practice will be challenging due to the complexity of the sector. Therefore, a feedback mechanism to check the clarity, level of engagement with the guidelines and need for associated changes could be valuable.

Q. Do the proposed themes (communication, education, diagnostics, research, data and sustainability) capture all the areas for development/further work that have previously been identified?

Q. Have we captured all the main activities, and do they sit under the correct theme?

There was consensus that the proposed themes (communication, education, diagnostics, research, data and sustainability) and associated activities detailed in the draft infographic captured all the areas for development identified in the November 2021 Workshop. There was general agreement that education and communication should be aimed at both prescribers and equine keepers. Some delegates felt that the term 'diagnostics' implied 'diagnosis', which is restricted to vets, and suggested the theme could be re-named, for example as 'monitoring', so that it is inclusive for all prescribers.

Delegates also suggested a new regulatory environment theme should be included. This could consider where best practice could be improved or mandated through guidance or additional legislation. For example, considering tighter control of online sales of anthelmintics and/or requiring enhanced record keeping of prescribing decisions, which could subsequently be audited.

Session 2: Who should be represented on the pan-industry equine group?

Q. Do you agree with the principle of having a core steering group and themes sub-groups as the structure for the pan-industry equine group?

There was consensus that the pan-industry equine group should have a core steering group to provide strategic direction. There was also agreement on the principle of having themes subgroups and that a chair from each subgroup could sit on the core steering group. It was agreed that the initial focus should be on the core steering group identifying the group's priorities and potential measurable success criteria to prevent scope creep. The core steering group, alongside further consultation if required, could also guide subgroup structure and priorities. These themes subgroups could operate differently, for example some might have an ongoing status, whereas others could be set up as Task and Finish groups.

It was acknowledged that smaller groups lead to better ownership and quicker progression of activities, however, larger groups lead to better representation and reach which is essential for implementation of activities. Some delegates expressed concern that without forming the subgroups immediately there is a risk of losing the broadscale expertise and enthusiasm from all who have engaged to date. The concept of a forming a '*cloud of interested stakeholders*' around the core steering group was suggested to establish subgroups in principle and keep wider stakeholders engaged.

Q. Who should be represented on the core steering group?

Q. How do those not sitting on the core steering group decide their representation and line of communication to the core steering group?

There was consensus that core steering group membership should be based on skills, expertise and ability to contribute to the agreed priorities. This representation could be altered in future to correspond with changing priorities and the associated expertise required. Delegates agreed that subgroup chairs should be elected based on their expertise and represent their respective subgroup on the core steering group. These subgroup chair positions could be rotated.

Delegates agreed that theme subgroups provide an opportunity for all stakeholders across the equine sector to feel represented. Most delegates agreed that equine keeper representation would be challenging due to the complexity of the sector. The British Horse Council engages with equine keepers across the sector and was suggested as a potential means to represent the view of equine keepers in the core steering group, and that additional input could come through the subgroups. There was consensus that all prescriber groups should be represented on the pan-industry equine group. Specific environmental, policy, retail/trade and scientist/research representation on the core steering group was also explored. Delegates felt it was important to give all stakeholders the opportunity to be involved where possible (for example self-nomination for the core steering group or subgroup(s) could be a

starting point) and to regularly engage with wider stakeholders, such as through workshops or forums).

It was proposed that stakeholder organisations could represent sub-sectors within the equine industry, for example BEVA could represent equine veterinarians and veterinary practices, NOAH could represent pharmaceutical companies to reduce the risk of bias from individual companies. A similar approach could be taken to deal with commercial interests of diagnostic companies/laboratories.

The potential line of communication between core steering group members and those not sitting on the core steering group was discussed. The terms of reference could detail the subgroup communication strategies to ensure each subgroup chair represents the views of all stakeholders in their respective subgroups. Similarly, for organisations representing stakeholder groups separate meetings could be convened to provide a forum for feedback.

Q. Should it be a requirement/expectation for stakeholder organisations on the core steering group to be a funder?

The group acknowledged that this initiative may require future funding. There was high level discussion around whether funding should be connected to the group's structure and membership, and therefore discussed at the initial stages. There was consensus that financial contribution should not be a requirement for core steering group membership. Delegates expressed concern that the requirement to be a funder could be a barrier for stakeholder participation and lead to bias.

It was recognised that stakeholder involvement and in-kind contributions such as time and expertise should not be underestimated and will be essential to the success of the group. It was acknowledged that the level of involvement with the group may differ between stakeholders depending on the group's priorities. The terms of reference could provide clarity on time expectations so that stakeholders can decide if they can commit to the work.

There will be a need for consistent funding to cover essential secretariat functions, as well as media and communications. The group should take advantage of the breadth of stakeholders involved and reach the wider audience through existing communication channels. Some delegates suggested organisations could contribute to a central funding pot and this could be match-funded by levy boards. The core steering group could be responsible for prioritising where this funding is spent, for example to sponsor research to close evidence gaps. Alternatively, the core steering group could be responsible for sourcing and directing funding rather than holding and distributing it.

Conclusions and next steps

There was a very encouraging level of engagement at this meeting and enthusiasm amongst delegates for active involvement in forming a pan-industry equine group. Delegates felt this initiative was worthwhile and that these discussions had already increased the profile of anthelmintic resistance as an issue in the UK equine sector. The following points were agreed by delegates to enable progression towards pan-industry ownership of this initiative.

Agreed points:

- A pan-industry equine group is essential to lead a coordinated approach to anthelmintic use and stewardship in the UK equine sector.
- This pan-industry equine group should have a core steering group to provide strategic direction, and seven themes subgroups (education, communication, diagnostics/monitoring, sustainability, research, data, and regulatory environment).
- The core steering group should:
 - Agree the scope, audience and authors of pan-industry best practice guidelines for sustainable control of equine parasites to be agreed, implemented and enforced across the industry.
 - Commission the development of these best practice guidelines.
 - Perform wider consultation on the structure, membership and task interdependencies of the themes subgroups as required.
 - Initiate further discussions regarding funding once the priorities and direction of the group are established.
- Stakeholders should be given the opportunity to express their desired level of involvement in the core steering group and/or themes subgroups by self-nomination.
- Interrelated stakeholders should liaise to nominate a designated representative for the core steering group and agree lines of communication.

Agreed next steps:

Overall, there was sufficient agreement amongst delegates on the broad principles of the pan-industry equine group to make tangible next steps to convening an initial core steering group meeting as follows:

- These meeting summary notes will be shared with wider stakeholders.
- The VMD will distribute a follow-up questionnaire to enable stakeholders to express their desired level of involvement with the project moving forwards.
- The VMD will convene an inaugural core steering group meeting to discuss and develop the group's strategy and priorities. This meeting will enable further discussion regarding the next steps to commission the pan-industry best practice guidelines

Attendees from the following organisations and professional bodies

- Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA)
- Animal Health Distributors Association (AHDA)
- Animal Medicines Training Regulatory Authority (AMTRA)
- Austin Davis Biologics Ltd
- Bimeda UK
- Boehringer Ingelheim
- British Equestrian Trade Association (BETA)
- British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA)
- British Horse Council (BHC)
- British Veterinary Association (BVA)
- CVS Group plc
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
- Equine Infectious Disease Surveillance (EIDS)
- Fyrnwy Equine Clinic
- General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC)
- Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA)
- Horserace Betting Levy Board (HBLB)
- Intelligent Worming
- James M. Wishart and Associates
- MSD Animal Health
- Murray Farmcare
- National Office of Animal Health (NOAH)
- Redwings Horse Sanctuary
- Royal Agricultural University (RAU)
- Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) Knowledge
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)
- Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS)
- Techion+
- TFM Country Store
- The British Horse Society (BHS)
- The Donkey Sanctuary
- The Horse Trust
- University of Bristol
- University of Kentucky
- University of Liverpool
- Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)
- Veterinary Pharmacist
- VetPartners
- Vetpol
- VetSkill
- Welsh Government
- Westgate Labs
- World Horse Welfare
- Zoetis UK Limited