

Response to CMA Consultation: Draft Substantive Order and Undertakings

Document(s) addressed: RCVS Monitoring Proposal; Draft Schedule 4 (Complaint Log); Draft Substantive Undertakings

Consultation question addressed: Whether the drafting achieves the aims of the remedies set out in the final report

Summary of concern

We support the final report's finding that pet owners need a fair, impartial, and effective way to raise concerns about veterinary care, and we accept that the inquiry group has settled on RCVS as the body responsible for supporting and monitoring compliance with the remedies. Our comments below are directed solely at whether the current drafting of the RCVS monitoring proposal and related schedules will actually deliver the accountability and transparency the final report identifies as necessary — not at the underlying decision to give RCVS this role.

As drafted, we do not think the proposal goes far enough to give pet owners confidence that individual complaints will be resolved fairly and independently. Three specific gaps stand out.

1. No binding resolution mechanism for individual complaints

The monitoring proposal, as drafted, appears focused on aggregate compliance monitoring (i.e. whether practices as a whole are meeting the requirements of the Order) rather than on providing pet owners with a route to a binding decision on their individual complaint.

Request: Please clarify whether the drafting is intended to give RCVS, or any other body, the power to investigate and issue binding decisions on individual complaints. If not, we ask that the explanatory note make explicit that individual dispute resolution remains outside the scope of these remedies, so that pet owners' expectations are not misled by the "complaint log" terminology in Schedule 4.

2. Insufficient separation between RCVS's

regulatory/monitoring function and any complaint-handling role

RCVS already accredits and has an ongoing professional relationship with the practices it would be monitoring under this Order. Where RCVS is also involved in receiving or reviewing complaints against those same practices (via Schedule 4 or otherwise), the drafting does not currently set out safeguards to ensure that function is operationally independent from RCVS's other regulatory and representative activities.

Request: We ask that the draft undertakings specify organisational or procedural separation (e.g. a distinct complaints-handling unit, ring-fenced decision-making, or an appealable route to a genuinely external body) so that the “marking its own work” concern does not undermine confidence in the remedy.

3. Complaint log (Schedule 4) needs a defined consequence pathway

As drafted, Schedule 4 appears to function as a record-keeping requirement. It is not clear from the drafting what happens to the information once logged — whether it feeds into compliance assessment, triggers any escalation, or is published in any form that allows external scrutiny.

Request: We ask that the drafting specify (a) what RCVS or the CMA does with complaint log data, (b) whether any aggregated or anonymised reporting will be made public, and (c) what threshold or pattern of complaints would trigger further action against a practice. Without this, the log risks becoming a passive record rather than an accountability tool.

Conclusion

We recognise this consultation is not the forum to revisit the decision to appoint RCVS as the monitoring body. Our request is that the drafting be strengthened so that the transparency and accountability aims set out in the final report are met in practice — specifically through clearer complaint-handling independence, a defined consequence pathway for logged complaints, and clarity on whether individual pet owners can expect a binding resolution to their complaint at all under these remedies.