



Working Together Policy



INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of this statement is to set out clearly, for both clients and veterinary professionals, how the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and the Veterinary Client Mediation (VCMS) will work together both generally and, in particular, when resolving concerns raised against veterinary professionals.
2. The RCVS is the statutory regulator for veterinary professionals. The RCVS's jurisdiction extends only to allegations of serious professional misconduct, which is defined as acts or omissions that fall far below the standard expected of a veterinary professional. The VCMS is a mediation service able to resolve all other types of concerns, from customer service issues to poor veterinary care (see VCMS Scheme Rules for more information).
3. The RCVS's aim is to set, uphold and advance veterinary standards in the interests of the health and welfare of animals. The role of the VCMS in mediating client complaints contributes to achieving this objective by providing consumers with a forum to raise consumer concerns or complaints, which do not necessitate investigation by the RCVS.
4. Both organisations understand that the concerns process can be difficult and stressful for all parties. We believe that co-ordination between the RCVS and the VCMS will help us to achieve our joint goals of protecting the public and of investigating/mediating concerns as swiftly and as smoothly as possible.

HYBRID COMPLAINTS

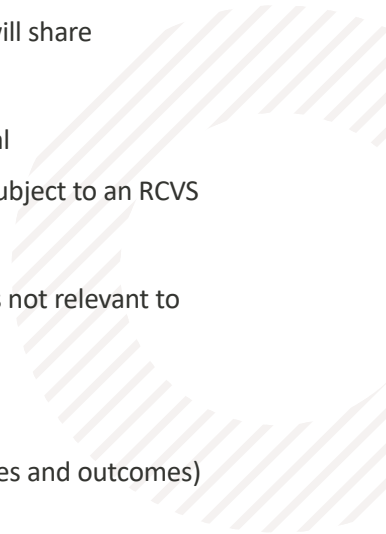
5. It is possible for complaints to be made against veterinary professionals that cut across both



the RCVS's regulatory jurisdiction and VCMS's mediation remit - for example a concern with an arguable case of serious professional misconduct that also includes allegations of poor customer service. If this occurs, the case will be referred in its entirety to the RCVS for investigation. However, once the RCVS closes its investigation, it is open to the parties to agree that any suitable matters should be considered by VCMS.

SHARING INFORMATION

6. The service provided by the VCMS is funded by the RCVS. The RCVS and VCMS are both mindful of their responsibilities in respect of the proportionate and secure sharing and storage of personal data.
7. For the purpose of enabling the VCMS to carry out its mediation role, the RCVS will share information with the VCMS as follows:
 - » In cases of doubt, confirming to VCMS the registration status of any individual
 - » When requested, confirming whether a veterinary professional is currently subject to an RCVS investigation in order to avoid duplication of proceedings.
8. The RCVS will not share the outcome of its investigations with the VCMS as this is not relevant to VCMS's function.
9. VCMS will share information with the RCVS as follows:
 - » Regular provision of caseload data (including details of complainants, case files and outcomes) via a secure mechanism
 - » To enable the RCVS to detect possible duplication of processes, identify trends and to evaluate the effectiveness and value for money of the service provided by VCMS
 - » For audit purposes to ensure that all matters falling within the RCVS's jurisdiction are being referred to the RCVS in line with this policy and the VCMS scheme rules.
10. In all other circumstances, the RCVS and VCMS will apply a public interest test to the sharing of information.
11. Details of veterinary professionals who are involved in a client complaint received by VCMS will only be shared with the RCVS:
 - » Where the factual circumstances and the information received by the VCMS in a specific concern indicate there may have been serious professional misconduct
 - » Where the VCMS receives more than two complaints concerning a veterinary professional or, where more than three complaints are received that relate to the same practice or practice group
 - » In other circumstances where it is in the client's interests, the wider interest of the public or the profession.





SIGNPOSTING AND REFERRALS

12. In most cases, when either the VCMS or RCVS receive a concern that is more appropriate for the other organisation we will advise the client to lodge their concerns directly with the other organisation.
13. The VCMS will pass the concern directly to the RCVS in the following situations:
 - » Where a complaint involves allegations that disclose an arguable case of serious professional misconduct
 - » When a concern is lodged with VCMS that raises clear public protection concerns
 - » Anonymous allegations of serious professional misconduct/fitness to practise concerns received by VCMS.

