

UK government launches the consultation on reform of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 28 January 2026

For a number of years, there has been a growing call for reform and much needed new legislation to replace the 1966 Veterinary Surgeons Act. On 28 January 2026, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ('DEFRA') launched a public consultation on the reforms on behalf of the governments of the four nations in the UK.

The Veterinary Client Mediation Service ('VCMS') has supported the calls for legislative reform and, in particular, business regulation and the transition to a 'fitness to practise' approach to the regulation of veterinary professionals.

Having initially reviewed the consultation and outline proposals, the VCMS welcomes the opportunity to share insight from the complaint resolution activity to feed into the key areas being considered by DEFRA including a move towards a licence to practise process, introducing a fitness to practise process, regulating businesses and animal healthcare providers, and ensuring that the governance of the professions and sector is up-to-date and fit-for-purpose.

Some of the proposals take forward the [Provisional Findings of the Market Investigation into veterinary care for household pets](#), and widen the scope of those remedies across the veterinary sector. The aim is to create a new framework that improves consumer confidence and proportionate regulation.

Veterinary practice and businesses are now more complex than ever before. This consultation allows veterinary professionals, animal owners and other key stakeholders to share their views and aims for a new legislative framework for the sector. A more modern framework will benefit both consumers and the professionals, who remain so committed to animal welfare and clinical standards.

Jennie Jones, Head of the VCMS, comments:

"This is a valuable opportunity to shape the future of veterinary care and build confidence between all involved. Nockolds, which runs the VCMS, also delivers complaint mediation and resolution in other regulated sectors. The insight from the profession, the public, and key stakeholders is key in adapting the best elements of human healthcare regulation and making it truly fit for purpose for the veterinary sector. We are committed to sharing our insight from VCMS and across regulation to help shape this. Over the last 10 years, there has been a clear need for a business regulation and a more modern and appropriate, forward-looking fitness to practise approach to maintain and grow confidence and to facilitate ongoing progress beyond the excellent clinical quality improvement which is embedded in veterinary care. We will continue to consider the details of the proposals and fully engage in the consultation as it is important that the government has as much information as possible to identify, assess, and manage the impact of any proposals so they are future-proof and fit for purpose."

The VCMS receives around 3,600 enquiries a year. Where a complaint cannot be resolved locally between the pet owner and practice, the VCMS provides mediated resolutions



with over 80% of veterinary businesses engaging in the process, and nearly 80% of complaints being resolved through VCMS mediation. The CMA provisional proposals include making mediation mandatory for veterinary business, alongside wider proposals to support more effective complaint handling in veterinary practices.

With nearly 80% of complaints mediated through the VCMS process resolved, it is important that pet owners know the VCMS is available when a complaint cannot be resolved with the veterinary business. One pet owner recently shared their feedback, *"The entire experience was professional, compassionate, and constructive. I now feel a sense of closure and hope that my input will lead to positive changes within the practice,"* and a veterinary practice contacted us *"Using the VCMS service [is] extremely helpful and beneficial for our complaints. We always reach a fair and non-biased outcome where all parties feel listened to"*. The process is very easy, and communication is always prompt and clear, which highlights the importance of an effective and accessible route to help pet owners and veterinary businesses resolve complaints when this cannot be achieved in-house.

The VCMS will be responding to the consultation before it concludes on 25 March 2026, and would encourage veterinary professionals, the veterinary team members, and pet owners to share their views.

28 January 2026



FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information, contact Jennie Jones, Head of VCMS jenniejones@vetmediation.co.uk or sueclark@nockolds.co.uk for press enquiries.

Please visit our website for our most recent **VCMS Annual Report**, which details our activity and also shares veterinary complaint data and insight.

The VCMS is delivered by Nockolds Solicitors, who specialise in complaint resolution in regulated sectors. The VCMS, through Nockolds, is an Approved ADR Body under the ADR Regulations (overseen by the CTSI). The RCVS contracts with Nockolds so the service is funded by the regulator, but delivered on an independent and arms length basis.

The service was established in 2017 following a pilot in 2016. The VCMS receives on average 3,500 a year. The VCMS can be directly accessed by pet owners, or veterinary practices can direct pet owners to the service. Click here for more information on [Contacting the VCMS](#) and [FAQs for pet owners](#)

The full details of the DEFRA consultation can be found [here](#).