

Veterinary Client Mediation Service Scheme Rules



UPDATED AUGUST 2026

ABOUT THE VCMS

The Veterinary Client Mediation Service (VCMS) is accredited by CTSI under delegated powers from the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, under the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024. (TO BE CONFIRMED POST ASSESSMENT)

The VCMS provides Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) for complaints brought by a consumer against a veterinary practice or veterinary professional where the complaint falls within the remit of the service.

To find out more about the VCMS process and remit, please visit:

<https://www.vetmediation.co.uk/what-we-do/our-process/>

The VCMS is a mediation-based service. Its process is voluntary and resolution focused. VCMS does not impose a decision on the consumer or the veterinary practice. Where a resolution is agreed, the outcome will be confirmed in writing and, where appropriate, recorded in a mediation agreement signed by both parties.

The VCMS ADR process is free to consumers.

MATTER	VCMS INFORMATION
Method	Mediation and mediation-based complaint resolution; no imposed decision.
Language	Mediation in English; initial complaint details can currently be received in several listed languages.
Consumer fee	Free to consumers.
Precondition	Consumer should normally exhaust the veterinary practice/business complaint process first.
Referral time limit	Normally within 12 months of the practice/business final response.
Withdrawal	Consumer may withdraw at any time.
Costs	VCMS can mediate financial resolutions. It does not however award legal costs, damages or compensation.
Proposed solution	Resolution requires party agreement as the VCMS is a mediation based service.

Court action	Participation in VCMS ADR does not prevent legal proceedings.
Complete case file	Both parties are notified in writing when the VCMS has the information needed for the ADR process to begin.
Average duration	60 days

The VCMS annual report can be viewed here: <https://www.vetmediation.co.uk/insights/downloads/>.

SCOPE OF THE ADR PROCESS

The VCMS uses mediation and mediation-based complaint resolution techniques to resolve complaints.

We offer ADR for consumer complaints relating to veterinary goods and services, customer care, clinical care, product-related issues, charges, aftercare, complaint handling, and communication between consumers and veterinary practices or businesses. The VCMS can usually consider complaints where the complaint concerns a veterinary practice, business, or veterinary professional within the scope of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons regulatory framework.

The VCMS is competent to deal with consumer veterinary complaints where the concern relates the service you have received or care provided to your animals. The VCMS is able to mediate complaints and concerns raised by individual animal owners regarding veterinary professionals and their practice.

The VCMS does not determine clinical negligence claims, make findings of fact, impose sanctions, award damages, or act as a regulator. Where a complaint raises serious clinical, conduct, safeguarding, or professional misconduct concerns, the VCMS may signpost or refer the matter to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons or another appropriate body.

CONTACT DETAILS

- VCMS, 6 Market Square, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM23 3UZ
- Telephone: 0345 040 5834
- Email: enquiries@vetmediation.co.uk
- Online complaint form: <https://submit.vetmediation.co.uk/SubmitComplaint/>
- Website: <https://www.vetmediation.co.uk/>

The ADR procedure is a telephone based mediation process. Information can be provided by online submission, email, post, telephone discussion, or secure electronic document sharing where appropriate.

LANGUAGE INFORMATION

The VCMS is currently able to receive complaint details in the following languages:

- Cantonese
- Greek
- Italian
- Portuguese

- Spanish
- Welsh

At the present time, the VCMS are unable to conduct mediation in languages other than English, but will provide help in finding translation assistance.

WHAT THE VCMS TAKES INTO ACCOUNT

We will take into account the relevant consumer complaint circumstances, the information and evidence provided by both parties, relevant professional and regulatory standards, consumer rights considerations, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' standards, and the principles of fairness, proportionality, independence, and impartiality when resolving complaints.

CONSUMER CHOICE AND LEGAL RIGHTS

- The complainant can withdraw their complaint from this ADR procedure at any time.
- The VCMS is a mediation-based service. Outcomes are not imposed by the VCMS. A resolution will only become binding where the parties agree the outcome and, where appropriate, record that agreement in writing.
- Participation in the VCMS procedure does not prevent a consumer seeking redress through the courts.
- The process is accessible and informal so both parties generally participate in the mediation process. The parties are entitled to be represented or assisted by another person during the process, but would not require legal representation.

TIMELINES

- The VCMS aims to work with the practice and consumer to reach a solution promptly. There is a target of 60 days from the Agreement to Mediate being returned by the consumer.
- The VCMS reports on the current average timelines within the annual report.
- The VCMS notes the maximum of 90 days from receipt of the complete case file for ADR processes (subject to any lawful extension for a highly complex dispute and notification to the parties). The VCMS keeps the parties informed if a case requires additional time.

REFERRING A COMPLAINT TO THE VETERINARY CLIENT MEDIATION SERVICE (VCMS)

- Veterinary practices and businesses should inform customers that they have access to a free ADR service through the VCMS, when they have reached the end of their internal complaints process. Details on how to contact the VCMS should be provided to customers by the practice or business.
- The complainant must have exhausted the veterinary practice or business's complaints process, before a complaint can be raised with the VCMS.
- Complainants have 12 months from the date of the veterinary practice or business's final response to raise a complaint with the VCMS.
- Only complaints within the VCMS remit can use this service. The VCMS will consider whether the complaint relates to a veterinary practice, business, or professional within the relevant scope of the service.
- Complaints can be submitted using the contact details outlined above, or by submitting

through the online portal, here. <https://submit.vetmediation.co.uk/SubmitComplaint/>

- When making a complaint, consumers should provide their contact details, details of the veterinary practice or business, a summary of the complaint, the outcome they are seeking, copies of relevant correspondence, and any relevant documents or records.

WHEN THE VCMS MAY REFUSE TO MEDIATE A COMPLAINT

The Veterinary Client Mediation Service (VCMS) may refuse to handle your complaint due to one or more of the following reasons:

- a. Prior to submitting the complaint to the VCMS the complainant has not attempted to contact the veterinary practice or business concerned to discuss the complaint and sought, as a first step, to resolve the matter directly with that practice or business.
- b. The dispute is frivolous or vexatious, or being pursued in a way that is unreasonable or disproportionate.
- c. The dispute is being, or has been previously, considered by another ADR entity regulator, court, tribunal, or other appropriate body.
- d. The complaint falls outside the scope or remit of the VCMS, including where no relevant veterinary practice, business, or Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons registrant can be identified.
- e. The complainant has not submitted the complaint within the time frames mentioned above.
- f. Dealing with such a type of dispute would seriously impair the effective operation of the VCMS.
- g. The complaint raises issues which are more appropriately considered by another body, including the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, another regulator, an ombudsman, a court, or a clinical negligence route.

ADR PROCEDURE

- Once the VCMS has received the complaint from the complainant, we will review it to ensure it is something we can handle. If it is not possible for us to handle your complaint, we will let you know as soon as possible and, where possible, you will be signposted to other organisation(s) who may be able to help.
- If the complaint can be handled, the VCMS will acknowledge this and ask the complainant to review and sign the Agreement to Mediate. Once received, the VCMS will contact the Veterinary Practice and collate the information regarding the complaint.
- Both parties are provided with details on the ADR procedure, including expected timeframes.
- If there is a conflict of interest, the VCMS's policy on this will be followed (see below).
- All relevant information will be collated by the VCMS from both parties, who will have a reasonable amount of time to express their points of view.
- The information required can be submitted either online, by email, through secure electronic sharing, by telephone where appropriate, or by post and may include, but is not limited to:
 - The complainant's name and contact details;
 - date of birth where required for identification;
 - details of the veterinary practice or business complained about;
 - the nature and circumstances of the complaint;
 - details of the animal – type, breed, name & age
 - details of any product or service involved;

- copies of correspondence with the practice or business;
 - copies of receipts, invoices, prescriptions, records, or other relevant documentation;
 - details of the outcome the complainant is seeking;
 - information about what steps have already been taken to resolve the matter;
 - details of any reasonable adjustments needed; and
 - any other information reasonably required to understand and progress the complaint.
- Once the VCMS has all the required information for the ADR process to begin, this will be considered the 'complete case file' and both parties will be notified in writing at this point.
 - The VCMS uses mediation to help the parties agree a resolution to the complaint. The resolution manager will use mediation and resolution techniques during interactions with each party.
 - Once the VCMS is in receipt of the complete case file, the VCMS aims to conclude the mediation within 60 days of the Agreement to Mediate being returned by the complainant.
 - The VCMS will keep parties to the dispute informed about the conduct and progress of any ADR being carried out through telephone contact, email contact, and other agreed communication methods. Communication methods will take account of reasonable adjustments where appropriate.
 - The complainant can withdraw their complaint from this ADR procedure at any time.
 - The Resolution Manager will facilitate the mediation process in a manner appropriate to the nature and circumstances of the complaint. The Resolution Manager is impartial and independent and will not make findings of fact, determine outcomes, or pass judgement on either party.
 - The parties will be encouraged to consider the issues raised, reflect on their impact, and explore possible options for resolution. The Resolution Manager may suggest possible options for resolution but will not provide legal advice, advocate for either party, or impose a decision.
 - The Resolution Manager may end the mediation at any stage if they consider that it is no longer appropriate, productive, or beneficial to continue.
 - If a resolution is agreed, this will be confirmed in writing and, where appropriate, recorded in a mediation agreement signed by both parties.
 - If a resolution is not agreed, the VCMS may provide a proposed resolution for the parties to consider. The complainant can accept or reject the proposed resolution.
 - The Resolution Manager or either party may request that the mediation be reviewed by a Senior Resolution Manager to consider whether further mediation may be beneficial.
 - Once the ADR procedure has concluded and a decision or proposed outcome has been reached, both parties will be provided with this in writing.
 - As the parties agree a resolution, rather than an outcome being determined by the VCMS and imposed, there is no formal appeal process against a VCMS mediated outcome. Where appropriate, the matter may be reviewed by a Senior Resolution Manager to consider whether further mediation is appropriate. If a complaint remains unresolved, the consumer may seek advice from another appropriate organisation or pursue any other available route.

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

Depending on the circumstances, participation in the VCMS ADR process may result in the following possible outcomes:

- advice or guidance to support local resolution;
- referral back to the veterinary practice where the practice's own complaint process has not been exhausted;
- signposting to another appropriate organisation where the complaint is outside the VCMS remit;
- resolution at an early-stage following VCMS intervention;
- a mediated agreement between the consumer and veterinary practice;
 - The VCMS does not award costs, damages, or compensation. Where a resolution is agreed, it may include both financial and non-financial resolutions such as practical steps such as further communication, remedial action, refund, replacement, apology, explanation, review, or another outcome agreed between the parties.
- a proposed resolution for the parties to consider;
- conclusion of the mediation without agreement; or
- referral to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons where the concern raises potential professional misconduct or regulatory issues.

As the VCMS uses mediation techniques to resolve complaints, the terms of the agreed resolutions are varied and directly linked to the needs of the parties involved. They are not limited to financial resolutions, and will often include:

- Apologies
- Acknowledgements
- Explanations
- Goodwill payments or charity donations
- Further treatment, goods or services (further examination, products etc)
- Protocol changes within the business
- Training and development within the veterinary business
- Any other agreed resolution.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The VCMS has a conflict of interest policy and procedure to support independence and impartiality in the handling of complaints. ADR officials are required to disclose, without undue delay, any circumstances that may, or may be seen to, affect their independence or impartiality or give rise to a conflict of interest with any party to the dispute.

The obligation to disclose a potential or actual conflict is a continuing obligation throughout the dispute resolution procedure. Where a conflict of interest is identified, the matter will be reviewed and appropriate steps taken, which may include reallocating the complaint to another Resolution Manager or taking other steps necessary to protect the fairness and integrity of the process.

All ADR officials are employed or engaged by Nockolds and are remunerated by salary, consultancy arrangement, day rate, or mediation rate. Remuneration is not linked to the outcome of any dispute



resolution procedure. No ADR official is paid directly by the veterinary practice, business, or trader involved in a complaint.

The VCMS maintains appropriate conflict of interest records and reviews declarations of interest at appropriate intervals.

REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND STATUS

These Scheme Rules have been drafted for the VCMS within the consumer ADR framework established by Part 4, Chapter 4 of the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 and the accreditation criteria in Schedule 26, together with the 2026 implementing regulations.

CHANGES TO THESE SCHEME RULES

The VCMS may update these Scheme Rules to reflect changes in law, accreditation requirements, regulatory standards, service scope or operating practice. The version and date should be shown on the published document. Any material change affecting a live complaint should be communicated where relevant to the parties.