GOVERNMENT VETERINARIANS WELLBEING SURVEY

FEBRUARY 2019

RESULTS SUMMARY

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Foreword

By Christine Middlemiss, United Kingdom Chief Veterinary Officer.

I welcome this report and thank the Association of Government Vets for their initiative in grasping the well-being 'nettle', a subject that can be difficult and awkward but must not be ignored.

The first steps in the journey of resolving a problem is to first recognise it and secondly understand it beyond the superficial and anecdotal. In my opinion this is what AGV have done with this report which they have conducted entirely themselves.

The report identifies that the sort of tasks that vets carry out directly for Government or in provision of inspection, assurance and verification services for clients on behalf of Government can have real well-being implications. This is no surprise to those of us who have worked in notifiable disease outbreaks – FMD 2001, HPAI or indeed in bTB surveillance. Our work can be contentious, physically challenging, with awkward hours, and difficult expectations to manage.

Government as an employer has come a long way in recognising the importance of well-being both physical and mental, in those who are employed by it. This includes provision of in confidence support, mentoring, review of working practices and improved training on health and well-being for managers and job holders. The report reminds us not to rest on our laurels.

Tackling well-being must not end up in the 'too difficult' box. Importantly the report contains the responses of a significant number of non-Government employed vets who undertake work their companies are contracted to do on behalf of Government. I commend the work the veterinary profession has done to date making well-being one of the top issues being addressed, working collaboratively funding and managing a number of excellent initiatives – MindMatters and Vetlife. Following this survey I am looking at how Government can contribute to these wider groups; that vets who do public health and national disease control work, regardless of their employer are included in the planning for and can access the training and support on offer; and where possible in contracting out work Government ensures that the importance we place on well-being of those doing the work is clear.

We are lucky to work in a profession that can be so rewarding. Our profession is lucky to have bright, dedicated, hard-working members up-holding it. Let's work together as a profession to achieve the well-being we all deserve.

Introduction to the report

by Dr. Rebeca García Pinillos, President of the Association of Government Veterinarians.

The Wellbeing of government veterinarians is paramount to ensure that we are equipped to undertake our roles at our best.

Whilst many wellbeing surveys have been undertaken to date none of them has specifically focused on the subgroup of veterinarians undertaking work for government, including both those directly employed by government, under contract and those working for other employers who deliver contracted government work.

Overall we were interested on the themes of **health and safety** (i.e. working in dangerous environments with people under stress; recognising there is no 'zero risk' but exploring if there is room for improvement; health and safety management systems); **workplace** (i.e. integration, working relationships, workload, professional recognition, professional indemnity and legal support, engagement with veterinary stakeholders, policy colleagues and other stakeholders/customers) as well as **mental health** (i.e. ethical dilemmas, change and uncertainty, coping with responsibility where there are decreasing resources, exploring perceptions that others lack understanding of government vets' roles/skills, coping with fatigue, management duties, difficult conversations, emotional impact on farmers, mass euthanasia/culling, being the "face" of policies on the farm, some of which may be unpopular e.g. tuberculosis, animal welfare, etc. social media effects, including reported concerns about the use of social media to criticise / compliment individuals as well as policies).

This report summarises the results of the Government Vet Wellbeing Survey (https://www.agv.org.uk/) carried out in 2018. The survey recognises the wide range of roles undertaken by vets in government, sometimes very different to those of veterinarians in practice, and the need to tailor wellbeing initiatives to specific veterinary groups. Whilst there may be some cross-over, this is an important first step to identify whether there are any specific areas affecting government veterinarians' wellbeing, available tools that are currently being used to support our sector and any gaps or best practice that can provide further detailed information on this sub-group of the veterinary profession.

I would like to thank everyone who has supported this initiative, particularly those who have taken the time to respond to the long list of questions circulated. Your effort has really helped to define and scope key issues that are relevant to the wellbeing of government veterinarians.

As president of the Association of Government Veterinarians I am proud to introduce this pioneer scoping report and I wholeheartedly hope that it serves as a first step to identify both the positive aspects of government veterinary work, and the issues, gaps and best practice that can help employers, relevant organisations and veterinarians take action themselves to create the best possible working environment and life for every veterinarian undertaking a government role. This will also help ultimately to support improvements to the health and welfare of animals and our society.

Executive summary report

By Council of the Association of Government Veterinarians**.**

This report provides a summary of the Government Vet Wellbeing Survey 2018, a self-selected anonymous survey across vets undertaking work for government (including both those directly employed by government, under contract, and those working for other employers who deliver contracted government work) designed to assess opinions on various aspects of wellbeing. The survey was disseminated via office notices, targeted emails, online blogs and social media.

The survey received over 700 responses, most of which originate from vets that have undertaken work for government for more than 10 years, working full time and spending the majority of their working time in the field.

The survey found the following key points:

- Overall participants felt they had clear work objectives, could manage their time effectively, had control over their own work and were able to manage distressing situations;

- Most participants were engaged in work outside contracted hours, had different priorities that were hard to combine and found their workload was high, with 16% describing their workload as unacceptable;

- Most participants felt they received sufficient training to undertake their work, though some areas where there could be improvements were identified;

- Most respondents did find they worked in challenging environments (emotionally and physically), with one third being unaware their employer had a workplace policy to deal with this;

- About a third of respondents have been involved in mass culling events and almost two thirds of these found the work emotionally challenging, with only 17% of those reporting they had support mechanisms in place during mass culling/euthanasia exercises. These mechanisms were used by half of those who were aware of them;

- Although most respondents worked in an organisation with a "walk away" policy when staff are faced with threats, more than a quarter of them were unaware of this;

- Many respondents did have to engage in difficult conversations, with about a quarter reporting they had received training for this, and the report recommends they are supported in their role and receive relevant training in these areas;

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- Some concerns about lone working were raised and a fifth of respondents felt their organisations could support them in this area; respondents shared a number of possible solutions to provide such support and these are described in detail in the report along with other related recommendations;

- Support from colleagues and being part of a team, seemed to provide an invaluable support mechanism to those colleagues who may be experiencing difficult periods;

- About half of respondents reported working in ethically-challenging situations, with witnessing/monitoring non-stun slaughter commonly quoted as a current example causing them distress;

- Less than half of respondents were aware whether their organisation had mechanisms to ensure they are briefed with the public key lines relevant to their role, and the report makes recommendations in this regard;

- Almost half of respondents did not think there was a career progression path for vets in their organisation, and recommendations are made in this regard;

- Respondents reported varying degrees of feeling isolated or under-valued at work and the report suggests more work is needed to explore this.

In summary, this report identifies a number of tools in place supporting government veterinarians' wellbeing, areas where further work to share and disseminate existing resources would be beneficial and gaps that need to be explored further.

Introduction

The Government Vet Wellbeing Survey 2018 was devised to increase our knowledge on the wellbeing of vets undertaking work for government (including both those directly employed by government, under contract and working for other employers who deliver contracted government work) within the UK at some point in their careers. It ran from 17th March to 16th June 2018 and was circulated to Association of Government Veterinarians (AGV) and Veterinary Public Health Association (VPHA) members (including contract Official Veterinarian (OV) organisations) as well as the Government Veterinary Services (GVS) contact points for wider dissemination across all UK Government Departments. In addition, an office notice was sent to Official Veterinarians (these are private vets authorised to undertake work for government, usually on behalf of Defra), and Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), and social media links were also shared within the Defra/APHA intranets and via the APHA, Defra, VPHA and AGV twitter accounts. This included links to videos from the UK Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO), President of AGV and the Head of GVS.

The overall objectives were to assess whether there were specific issues affecting the wellbeing of vets undertaking work for government, identify existing tools to promote wellbeing available for government vets, identify best practice, gaps and areas where there is room for improvement. Questions were developed by colleagues within the wider Defra family and the survey was carried out via Survey Monkey.

The survey was anonymous with no data collected about the respondents other than generic information reported in section 1. It was open access so any person with the link was able to complete the survey. There are a number of caveats with the survey. The first is that this was distributed by email and social media generically. As there was no sampling technique and respondents were self-selected, bias could have been introduced from the non-random selection. Furthermore the questions were not piloted nor cognitively tested so may be open to misinterpretation.

This means that ultimately the survey is not a rigorous assessment of wellbeing but instead provides a good initial indication of work-related examples and wellbeing feelings amongst veterinarians undertaking government work. It lays the ground-work for future interventions aimed at improving wellbeing. Where private practitioners are cited, this relates to contracted private practice veterinarians who undertake work on behalf of the government.

Summary and discussion of responses

A total of 705 replies were received. A summary of the main factors reported as affecting wellbeing, as identified by a social science analyst, are listed in **Figure 1**. When looking in detail at the responses they indicate that assessing wellbeing is a complex matter due to its multifactorial nature and it is affected by a number of different features.

Key factors that affect wellbeing of Government Vets				
	Yes	No	Acceptable	High or unacceptable
Workload over the past six months:			25%	75%
Different priorities that are hard to combine*	77%	23%		
Do you work in a challenging environment (physical and/or mental)?	90%	10%		
Role requires difficult conversations*	94%	6%		
Role requires ethically challenging tasks*	57%	43%		
Witnessed distressing situations*	54%	46%		
Involved in mass culling / euthanasia*	36%	64%		
Involved in culling, and found emotionally challenging*	25%	75%		
Negative social media impact on personal resilience*	29%	71%		
Work outside contracted hours in last 6 months*	18%	82%		
Can influence the outcome of distressing situations	67%	33%		
Control over own work	67%	33%		
Manage time effectively	73%	27%		
Clear work objectives	73%	27%		

*Original questions are negatively worded, a positive answer of 'yes' suggests a detrimental impact.

1. <u>Background information</u>

1.1 Respondent organisations

The survey received a total of 705 responses with the top three respondents categories coming from private veterinary practice undertaking work for government, APHA and Contractor A, followed by DAERA and the FSA Other employers listed separately included two vets employed by a Local Authority, eight private practice vets (these results have been merged with the 'private veterinary practice' category), three involved in contract research, two in local government, two from an private educational company, four from non-UK government and one self-employed. (See **Table 1)**

What organisation are you employed by?		
Answer Choices	**Responses**	
Private veterinary practice	44%	310
APHA	25%	177
Contractor A	11%	75
DAERA	6%	41
Other (please specify)	3%	21
FSA	3%	20
Contractor B	2%	17
Defra	2%	11
Home Office	2%	11
Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)	1%	8
Ministry of Defence	0.9%	6
Welsh Government	0.6%	4
Scottish Government	0.3%	2
	Answered	**703**
	Skipped	**2**

Table 1: Organisations respondents identified they were from with a breakdown of the proportion of representatives for each organisation

1.2 Length of time working for government and working hours

Just over 75% of all respondents (76.7%) worked full time, with under a quarter (23.3%) working part-time. This indicates the employment pattern of the respondents, it does not specify if the respondents spent 100% of their time doing work for government or a much smaller proportion. This is shown in **Table 2**.

Service Range (Years)	Percentage of Total Responses
0-2	17%
3-5	16%
6-10	15%
> 10	52%

Table 2: Length of time respondents undertook government work.

1.3 Location and working patterns

In regards to working location, approximately 51% of respondents spent their working life in the field (i.e. abattoirs, farms, etc.), while 39% were office based (excluding home or slaughterhouse office) with the remainder 10.6% home based (Q4).

Employer/location	Percentage of respondents
Full time - office (excluding home or abattoir office)	89%
The field (e.g. abattoirs, farms, etc.)	51%
Home based	11%
Gov - office	24%
Gov – field	11
Private – office	14%
Private – field	14%
Other	14%

Table 3: Summary of work location and a further break down of this into government and private.

Comparing working pattern to location, there was little difference between field vets and office based vets with a marginally greater proportion of office vets working part time.

The longer the service in government, the less likely the respondent was to be working full time. For example, for those working as a government vet for 10 years or greater, only 68% work full time whereas those who have been serving for 0-2 years, 89% work full time. See **table 3** for a summary of responses.

In conclusion, the majority of respondents to this survey have worked in government or more than 10 years, work full time and spend most of their working time in the field.

2 Health and safety

2.2   Challenges and support

90% of respondents reported that they work in a challenging environment (physical and/or mental).

67% were aware of having a workplace policy in place to support them when faced with violence and/or aggression. Of the remainder 14% stated their employer did not have such a policy and 19% didn't know if such a policy was in place.

Recommendation 1: Employers could raise awareness of or, where not available, establish workplace policies to support veterinarians when faced with violence and/or aggression at the work place.

33.9% of all respondents (with 26% as "don't know") are supplied with dynamic risk assessment training. Two respondents skipped this question and 39.9% stated they do not have access to dynamic risk assessment training.

Recommendation 2: Employers could raise awareness of or, where not available, establish dynamic risk assessment training.
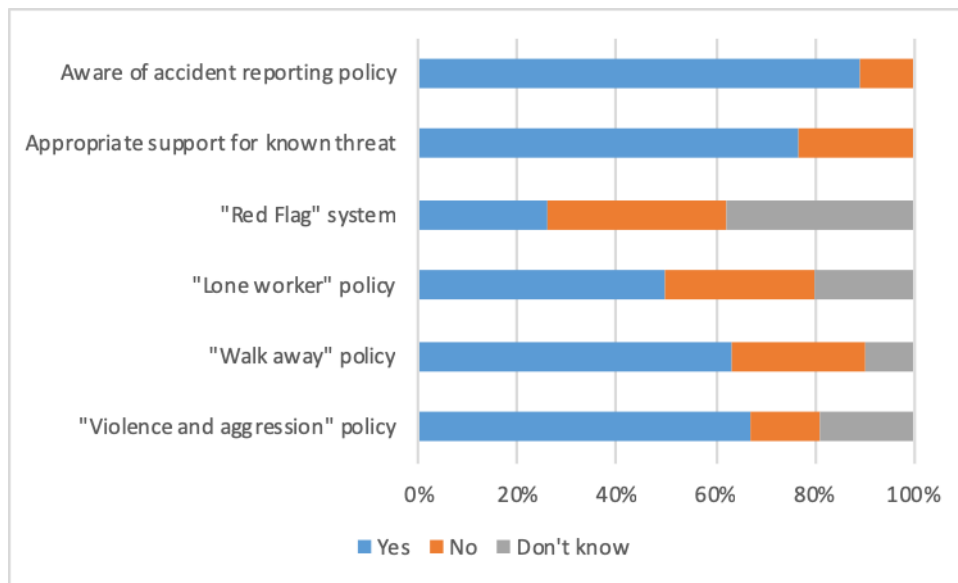
Figure 1: Graph describing the awareness of staff of the main health and safety policies

All figures are %

	Government	Private	Office	The Field	Home based
"Violence and aggression" policy	87	53	73	59	81
"Red Flag" system (see section 2.6)	38	17	33	21	25
Appropriate support for known threat	88	70	83	72	85
"Walk away" policy	79	52	61	62	76
"Lone worker" policy	70	36	63	38	57
Aware of accident reporting policy	94	86	91	88	89

Table 4: Summary of number of respondents aware of health and safety policies, according to government-private employment group and main place of work.

Respondents working directly for government were more likely to report that health and safety policies are in place. Office-based employees were also more likely to report such systems.

2.3   Training

While 73% of respondents felt they have sufficient training to take on their roles about a quarter (27%) felt they lack sufficient training. 'Private practitioners were more likely to feel they had sufficient training for their government roles than vets employed directly by government (83% versus 58%). This may be due to a number of reasons including a lack of specialist veterinary training versus corporate/civil service training.

Some of the reasons provided by those reporting the lack of sufficient training were:

1. Lack of time
2. Difficult to interpret instructions
3. Changing IT systems
4. Infrequent training
5. Training not of sufficient quality

Table 4 provides a breakdown of the different training offered to respondents:

Question	Percentage answered Yes
Sufficient training available to undertake your work	73%
Dynamic risk assessment training?	34%
Employer has system to brief key lines to take with the public	42%
Difficult conversations training (where appropriate)*	25%
Management skills training (where appropriate)**	42%

Table 4: Summary of responses on training offered assessing what proportion of respondents had received these types of training.

* 94% of respondents are in roles which role require "difficult" conversations

**46% of respondents have line management responsibilities

Recommendation 3: Employers could develop or make available more practical training delivered by experienced staff by identifying areas where vets feel training is lacking and considering multiple ways of providing support/training

2.4   Accidents and Near Misses

Approximately 90% of the respondents were aware of how to report accidents and near misses within their organisation.

Only 19% have had to do so in the last six months. However the real number of accidents and near misses could be higher as 27.8% of respondents reported a number of reasons preventing them from reporting accidents or near misses (**Table 5**):

Reason	Proportion
Lack of time	35%
Concern for consequences	16%
Too arduous	13%
Unsure how to report it	12%
System issues	2%
Other (please specify).	23%

Table 5: Top reasons for not reporting an incident (accident or near miss)

Other reasons listed were:

- No one else reports
- Discouragement to report or not in accordance to guidance
- Incident not considered serious enough to merit reporting. Mental health or stress related were given as examples that may not be considered to be significant enough to report
- Procedural issues such as complex reporting systems leading to non-reporting or staff using alternative mechanism (i.e. report directly to manager or director); lack of external system / procedures validation or complex and time consuming management procedures to follow up (i.e. grievance)
- No management/organisational action taken following reporting - feeling that it is a waste of time "nothing would come of it"
- Did not think of reporting or felt it was their fault
- Individual management responses turning the issue back on the victim
- Too many incidents to report

From the above, understanding of the process for how to report an accidents appears to be good overall, however some systems appear to be slow or difficult to use, including the reporting and the way that follow up of reported incidents is undertaken. Concerns around lack of action and potential consequences are seen as deterrents for reporting.

An area which merits attention is on-farm testing, where several respondents flagged up that the number of incidents is too high to report

Recommendation 4: Review on-farm testing safety and whether there are examples of best practice that can be applied in order to reduce incidents.

Recommendation 5: Review accident reporting and follow up with an action to simplify systems and ensure follow up action or a review with a forward plan is taken following reports.

2.5 Equipment

91% of all respondents believe they have the correct equipment to carry out their roles, although only 45% have carried out ergonomic, display screen and/or equipment risk assessments (**Table 6**).

% positive:

	Office	The Field	Home based
Do you have the correct equipment to carry out your role?	90%	93%	84%
Have you carried out an ergonomic / display screen / equipment risk assessment?	58%	33%	58%

Table 6: Proportion of respondents who have received the correct equipment for their roles and whether they have received a risk assessment for their equipment.

Government sector vets carry out more ergonomic and other assessments than private (67% versus 30%). This may be related to the more corporate nature of civil service, with stricter civil service health and safety procedures / instructions.

Recommendation 6: Consider whether equipment risk assessments are necessary and if yes, how can staff be encouraged/incentivised to risk assess their equipment

2.6 Hazards and customer interactions

26% of respondents work in organisations which have a "Red Flag" system in place to identify particularly hazardous places and situations, with 36% replying Don't Know. However, while 77% of respondents work in organisations that provide appropriate support when there are known threats, 23% of respondents reported that they do not receive appropriate support where there is a known threat.

Red flag systems were reported more commonly by government office-based vets (40%) when compared to private office-based vets – overall the reporting of presence of red flag systems was low across all groups but especially so for private sectors. It may be the case that health and safety is generally given a greater priority in government. 63% of respondents work in organisations that have a "walk away" policy when staff are faced with threats, with 27% of respondents not knowing if a policy existed within their organisations. 10% worked in organisations without walk away policies

On the subject of "lone working", 50% of respondents worked in organisations which do have a lone worker policy or standard, almost 30% did not know if their organisation had such a policy. A fifth of respondents (20.2%) worked in organisations without lone working policies). Only 19% of respondents felt their organisations had a solution to lone working, whilst 32% felt they didn't and almost half of them (48.50%) didn't know.

Some of the solutions shared within the survey are included in **Table 7** below:

Solutions currently in use for lone working vets

Trackers and alert pagers (i.e. ability to track via mobile phone apps)

Phone or text in/phone or text out policy

Check at end of working day

Able to call another member of staff, director or even police (i.e. Night-time - duty vet messages mobile in office so they can be traced and found; line manager informed and with access to location and times of all visits)

Work scheduled on calendars, which is accessible remotely by management

Line manager making unannounced visit on occasional basis

Inform a colleague who is present in a different place or the gatehouse / colleague available for support if needed

Use an out-of-hours service to monitor the situation and have a point of contact

Only undertake lone working with known clients

Have a constantly updated list of high risk visits

Inform, discuss, follow up

Staff keep the door locked until a second member of staff arrives

"Buddy System" - no member of staff is allowed to work alone; visits always require two people to attend. Lone working is banned except under strict safe circumstances. Last two team members on site must depart together. Attendance at new welfare incidents is always a two-person visit; lone worker first aid training is provided; duty manager available to call if a visit is required OOH

Back up in place to call upon if the situation may require more than one person

Panic button / panic button on mobile phone system / panic alarm to police / video-audit panic recording system / personal alarm carried by lone vets / SOS system / security alarm active at the practice

Locked building, appointments scheduled by phone only,

Lone worker safety device that alerts if worker becomes recumbent/motionless and also has a panic alarm (under trial)

Included in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy of Protect, Prevent, Detect and Treat

Code word to use on phone call if threatened while on house visits

No working at height when alone

Lone working training (guidance on how to reduce the risks presented)

SOPs in place (including contacts)
Call back system with answer service they to alert another member of staff if not contacted answer service in 30 minutes. Call-back system can include a function for them to check we have left a "concerning" farm safely and if there is no communication another vet is alerted
Ensuring our partner (eg spouse) or colleague knows where we are or use our commercial answering service to check on us
Radio contact with on-site security team
Use of sky guard equipment
Walk away if feel threatened / red flags arising
Always take my dog with me
Staff encouraged to report any situation they think would be of higher risk, and report to line manager or senior member of staff
Indicate to the next person when they should expect arrival, sticking to a pre-arranged time table
Will never work alone with animals. Unacceptable for farmer to leave area whilst working - would halt whatever is happening
Car trackers for location
CCTV on premises which can log into before arriving
Log in at the gatehouse with an estimated time of departure - if not checked out by eg. half an hour or so after this time, they either call you or come to look for you

Table 7: A table indicating the free-text strategies currently in use under lone worker policies

Some felt lone working policies were not very satisfactory, in that they basically require vets not to undertake work in potentially risky situations where, as a veterinarian, they feel obliged to work. Some noted that this happens without being recorded and several confirmed this is part of the day-to-day work of a single-handed practitioner and that they simply get on with it, using their common sense and judgement. Others noted that, on occasions, they are required to report to someone who may not be working at the time they are the contact due to lack of personnel.

The free text quotes generally stated that often staffing is an issue meaning vets may go out to farms alone but also many state that existing lone worker policies could be improved.

Recommendation 7: Veterinary employers should develop, raise awareness and implement lone working policies and walk away policies when employees are faced with dangerous situations.

Recommendation 8: Ensure sufficient staff are available to comply with lone worker policies or reschedule visits.

Recommendation 9: Investigate why almost a quarter of respondents do not receive support when there are known threats.

From the responses it seems that there is room for improvement on communication of "defensive" policies to staff. All the questions that had a "don't know" response available scored highly (between 26% & 50%). This is something that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency as this lack of information / knowledge may contribute to feelings of isolation and lack of respect amongst the vets.

3   Wellbeing at the workplace

3.2   **Workload and working strategy**

With regards to workload, 77% of the respondents noted that they have conflicting priorities at work with over 50% feeling that they had a high workload, about a quarter felt their workload was acceptable and about 16% who felt the workload was unacceptable. It should be noted that less than 1% of the respondents claimed their workloads as low or minimal. See **Figure 2.**
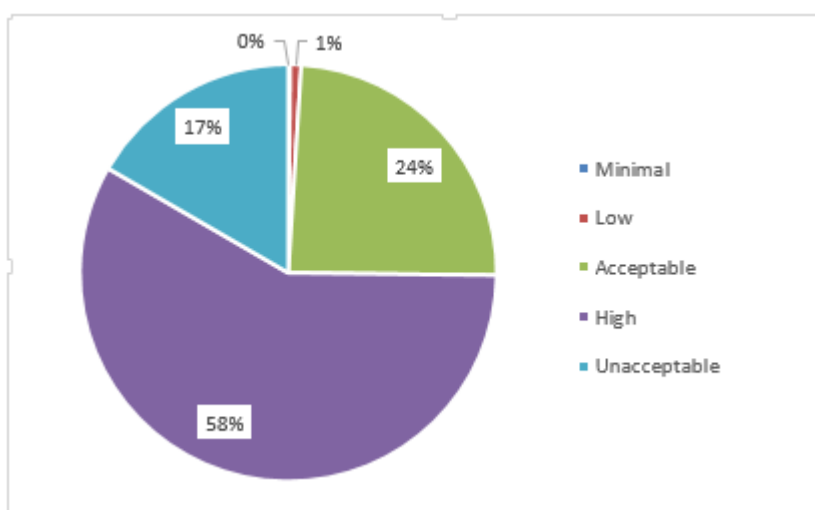

Figure 2: Pie Chart describing the variation of workloads reported by respondents.

Despite the above, there was a more positive picture with the control of the way vets work (67%) and having clear working objectives (73%). When comparing government versus private practice sector and office versus field workers there were similar levels of having clear work objectives reported by respondents across all groups.

Generally vets across all the groups believe they manage their time effectively. However, when you look at the subset of those who have reported suffering from a mental health condition it drops to 63% which is less than those who do not report having a mental health condition (80%). Further in-depth investigation would be necessary to ascertain the consequences of this and whether this was a cause or an effect.

Overall, vets employed both directly by government and in practice reported similar levels of working outside of contracted hours, however, a higher percentage of government vets reported that they had to work outside of their contracted hours (85%) in comparison to private vets (78%).

Response	Yes
Manage time effectively	73%
Control over the way you work	67%
Different priorities which are hard to combine	77%
Completing work outside of contracted hours	81%

Table 8. A table describing the workload and time management considering how well government vets are able to manage their time but also their work constrains.

3.3   Ethics

56.8% of respondents find tasks within their role(s) ethically challenging, and as a good correlation with this, 53.6% of respondents have witnessed situations that they have found distressing. 27.7% of respondents had not seen distressing situations, whilst 18.8% reported that they were not sure if they have witnessed a situation that they found distressing.

Figure 4 below includes a text analysis of the 377 responses specifying distressing situations witnessed. Overall issues affecting the suffering of animals (welfare and neglect cases) and people (i.e. famer depression, hardship, loss of herd, etc.) appear to be the most common stressors, followed by difficult, aggressive and bullying behaviours. Suicide is not a word that appears in the word cloud but is mentioned by a number of respondents in relation to farmers or colleagues' mental health issues. Unnecessary animal abuse, lack of adequate animal care/management and poor/forceful animal handling, particularly in cattle, also featured in several comments.

Distress and post-traumatic stress disorder following Foot and Mouth mass euthanasia that took place within the UK in 2001 was also mentioned. Witnessing monitoring non-stun slaughter also featured in multiple responses.

Q44 As part of your role, have you witnessed situations that you found distressing?

Cruelty Upset Owners Verbal Abuse Extreme Neglect Bullying Particularly Difficult Intimidation Colleagues Religious Slaughter Euthanasia Say Farmers Team Welfare Foot and Mouth Distressing Force Culling Leading Animal Suffering Physical Staff Injured Animals FMD Aggressive Behaviour Vet

Figure 3: Word cloud with key free-text words in responses related to situations which were found to be distressing. The larger the word the more frequently this occurred.

The included free text comments generally focus on the fact that there have been situations which can be distressing and cite certain events which can be ethically challenging. Some respondents appeared to accept that suffering and distress was an intrinsic part of the profession.

54% of respondents know where to go to within their business when faced with an ethical dilemma and 44% are aware of the support available to them when faced with a distressing situation. 67% believe that they can influence the outcome of situations they find distressing.

Recommendation 10: Identifying the different stressors affecting vets and designing tailored support coping tools/training could be helpful for those that are not already available (i.e. there is already information on bullying and harassment but perhaps not so much for coping with witnessing incidents, or animals in extreme suffering)

3.4 Management

Almost half (46%) of respondents stated that they had line management responsibilities. When asked about training, almost half (48%) of that 46% claimed to have received training to equip them for carrying out this task.

Recommendation 11: Explore staff management roles and how individuals are affected by the presence/absence of training to equip them for management roles.

When asked whether they believe if they manage their time effectively 73% claim they do so, however just over a quarter of respondents (26.7%) didn't think this was the case.

Recommendation 12: Exploring further why veterinarians feel that they are not able to manage their time effectively may help to explore initiatives that could improve wellbeing and productivity.

3.5   Engagement

38% of respondents believe they have regular opportunities to engage with policy/operational colleagues, and 32% believe they have regular opportunities to engage with veterinary stakeholders. Regarding regular opportunities to engage with other stakeholders/customers, 36% believe they do and 38.7% believe they don't. About a quarter (25%) don't know if there are regular opportunities for them to engage with non-veterinary stakeholders/customers.

65% of respondents feel that they do nor regularly engage with policy / operational colleagues i.e. "policy does not understand what goes on the "front line" or vice versa", "policy are ensconced in their ivory towers", "no one cares about us" etc. this could lead to very profound negative feeling or disengagement,

Recommendation 13: Explore how to develop better levels of engagement between veterinarians and policy/operational colleagues.

3.6   Communications

Less than half of respondents (42%) noted that their organisations have a mechanism to ensure they are briefed with the public key lines relevant to their role, a third of respondents (34%) reported no briefing taking place and almost a quarter were unaware whether this did occur (24%).

Recommendation 14: The fact that less than half of respondents were aware of a briefing mechanism could add pressure to veterinarians and place them in a difficult position where their clients may have more knowledge than them about the government lines. Measures should be in place to ensure all vets undertaking work for the government are adequately briefed and aware of public lines relevant to their role.

Recommendation 15: All stakeholder public communications should be circulated to vets working in the area in advance or, as a minimum, at the same time the announcement is released to stakeholder or other government officials.

In relation to public perception, 11% of respondents believed it was good, with 0.6% believing is "very good", whilst 46% of respondents believe that the public's perception of government veterinarians is poor to very poor (34% poor; 12% very poor).

Looking at veterinarians' perception of communications between government and veterinary staff the majority believe that these are poorly communicated (41%), closely followed by those who think they are acceptable (35%). Just under a quarter think communications are good sometimes (21%), whilst very few think they are good at all times (2%).

When asked about communications between government and the public direct replies follow a similar pattern to those between government and vets with the majority thinking communications are poor (39%), closely followed by those that think are acceptable (38.3%), and less than a quarter thinking they are good sometimes (22.2%) with very few reporting them as good at all times (0.6%)

Interestingly, when asked about communications from vets to the public, 46.4% believe that these communications are "good sometimes" with very few reporting them as good at all times (2.6%) and about a third seen as acceptable (31.7%) with only 19.4% seen as "poor".

Recommendation 16: Review communications affecting government veterinarians work areas and how these are managed to ensure veterinarians are aware and engaged as necessary

3.7   Dealing with Change

39% of respondents are clear about how changes at work will work out in practice, and about half of them 52% believe they have enough opportunities to question managers about changes at work.

Recommendation 17: It would be helpful to identify which subsets of employees are not clear about the practical impact of changes at work, and whether this could be remedied.

3.8   Indemnity insurance

61.9% of respondents have professional indemnity insurance while 14% do not and 24.1% don't know.

Recommendation 18: given that almost a quarter of vets are not aware if they have professional indemnity insurance it would be helpful to better communicate this to vets, and to investigate why 14% of them are not covered by professional indemnity/insurance.

3.9   Career progression

Almost half of respondents (45.7%) didn't think there is a career progression path for vets in their organisation, with 39.1% thinking there was one and 15.1% who did not know if one existed within their organisations. Overall, 59.5% were not content that career progression opportunities were open to them. This may be a lead indicator to overall career unhappiness and may be a factor in vets leaving the service.

Recommendation 19: Explore career progression paths and opportunities for vets and, if necessary, develop a career progression and communication strategy.

Recommendation 20: Review career progression opportunities within government and access restrictions of local authority/contract veterinarians to agency and central government vet roles (and vice versa).

4   Mental health / overall wellbeing

4.2   Feeling valued and respected at work

4% of all respondents feel isolated at work all the time and 62% feel isolated sometimes. A third of respondents (33%) never feel isolated.

Staff working in the office reported 38% never, 59% sometimes and 2.2% always; staff working in the field had the higher isolation feelings with 27.3% never, 65.9% sometimes and 7% always and home based staff 43% never, 55% sometimes and 1% always. The split between government (282) / practice (416) vets was fairly similar and the feeling of isolation was higher on staff working full time (541), versus those working part time (164), as described in **Table 9** below.

The survey did not specify whether isolation meant feeling excluded or working remotely, away from the team so respondents may have attributed different meanings to this question.

	Never	Sometimes	Always
Field	27%	66%	7%
Office	38%	59%	2%
Home	43%	55%	1%
Government	35%	63%	2%
Private Practice	32%	63%	6%
Full Time	31%	64%	5%
Part Time	40%	58%	2%

Table 9: Data on responses related to the feeling of isolation across the different groups represented in the survey.

Recommendation 21: More could be done to explore this feeling of isolation and see if there are ways to make vets undertaking government roles feel less isolated.

Recommendation 22: Consider developing team building exercises, particularly for field staff.

Recommendation 23: Consider arranging sessions for government vets and their teams similar to those being led by the RCVS under the Mind Matters initiative about mental health and how to recognise colleagues who may be experiencing mental health issues.

Just over half of the respondents (51%) feel valued at work. Out of those feeling valued, the majority were working in an office-based environment (52%) whilst less than half were working in a field-based environment (38%). Slightly more government vets didn't feel valued (52%), versus those in practice (46.2%). This appears to indicate that vets working in an office-based environment feel more valued than those working in the field and that vets employed directly by the government feel slightly less valued than those in private practice. It is very concerning that about half of respondents did not feel valued by the work they do and it will be important to ensure that more is done to provide recognition for veterinary work within the government context. See **Figure 4**.
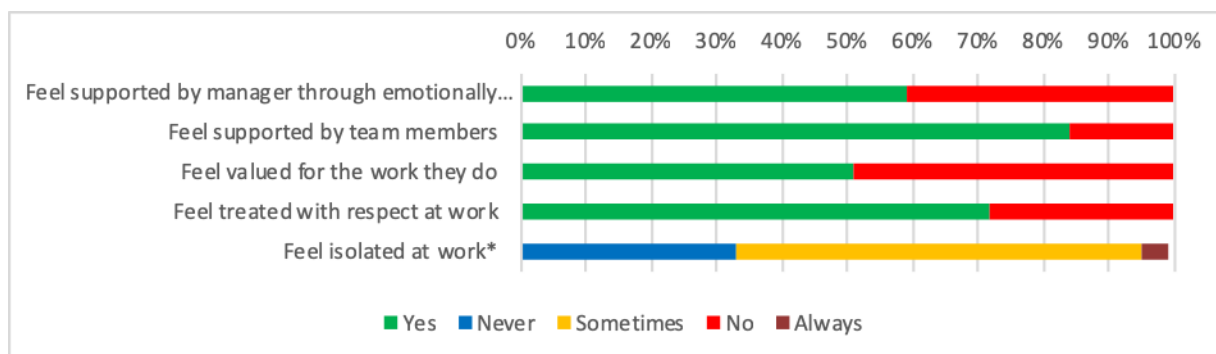

Figure 4: A graph describing the feeling of value and other factors affecting self-esteem at work

 * Answer response categorised different: never / sometimes / always, vs yes / no

environment or other factors such as the enforcement-based role with direct interaction with business operators who may be upset at the time of enforcement action been communicated.

In both government and private sectors the feeling of being treated with respect is lower in the field than office – this implies that it could be more related to the occupational setting itself rather than a factor that varies by sector.

Recommendation 24: Explore in more detail whether vets working in an office environment feel they are treated with more respect than those working in a field environment and why.

The figures of respondents reporting they feel valued at work vary from those of respondents who believe they are respected at work (52% vs 72%). At field level, for example, there are different groups relating to the vets; from vet team to technical team, managers (direct or higher), customers and different groups of admin. It is possible that some people feel valued or respected by some of these groups but not so much by others, however further work would be needed to fully understand this difference in feeling valued versus feeling respected.

	Office work	Field work	Home Work
Feel valued	52%	38%	62%
Treated with respect	73%	61%	80%
Manager is open to their ideas	80%	77%	84%

Table 10: Response summary of feelings of value and respect at work.

Recommendation 25: It is of key importance that the key role undertaken by the veterinary workforce is recognised accordingly. Identifying ways as to how this could be better than would be a first step to resolve ongoing concerns about lack of recognition and feeling undervalued by many veterinarians working within Government.

4.3   Stress

Most respondents, 94%, have roles that require difficult conversations, with just 6% reporting their role didn't involve difficult conversations. Yet only 23% have received training to perform this task, 70% stated they have not received difficult conversations training and for 6% this was not applicable.

Just over half of the respondents believe their management support them during emotionally demanding work. However, only 41% know how to access other methods of support with 59% unaware as to how to access alternatives. Methods of support mentioned by respondents are included in **Table 11:**

Support tool named	Number of respondents naming it
Colleagues	110
Management	37
Vet support group, Veterinary Benevolent Fund (VBF) helpline and staff/external helplines	35
Vetlife	26
HR / SHAW team / wellbeing adviser	26
Mentor	24
Intranet / internet	23
Employee Assistance Programme (i.e. care call)	20
External agencies - veterinary association (i.e. BVA, BSAVA, SPVS, BEVA)	19
Civil service learning / CPD / ACAS training / literature / mindfulness webinars / workshops about stress awareness and how to handle stress	13
Friends / family	11
Counselling / mental health advice service	11
Coaching; Veterinary coach	9
Mind Matters Initiative / RCVS	7
Veterinary Defence Society	7
Facebook group	6
GP / BUPA	5
Good Samaritans	3
Health support / health assured	3
Vet mums	2
WhatsApp groups with colleagues/team members	2
Open door policy	2
Literature / professional journals	2
Church life	1
Veterinary Christian Fellowship	1
Anonymous forum	1
Shadowing	1
Suicide helpline	1
Work Union	1

Table 11: Table describing the suggested mechanisms of support used by vets and the corresponding frequency of each mechanism.

Overall, the vast majority of respondents preferred a colleague-based support network, much of which seems to take place already and takes place on an informal basis. Recognition of this and allocation of time for support to team members / colleagues could be made to ensure the necessary resource is available.

Some respondents noted that whilst support tools are available the level of resource available is not enough for staff to be able to make use of them. References to face to face versus remote support were also made, with a preference for face to face support expressed, contrasting with the challenges and practical aspects which do not always make this possible.

A number of respondents also implied that vets do not see themselves or are not seen as a professional group which requires tailored support. Some also believed that showing a need for staff support may be seen as a weakness.

A small number of respondents named available resources but flagged that they were not fully aware of what was the detail of the offer available to them or have not made use of them.

36% of respondents have been involved in mass culling events, with 71% of those who did take part finding the work emotionally challenging and out of those only 44 of respondents had support mechanisms in place during mass culling / euthanasia exercises with just 21 of them making use of them.

Recommendation 26: Provision of more support (emotionally, psychologically and physically) should be made available to those involved in major, high profile events. It would also prove beneficial to ensure that these support mechanisms are advertised as widely as possible amongst those taking part, so they can avail themselves of the support as soon as possible, and amongst the wider veterinary community.

Recommendation 27: Given that a high number of vets report high workloads, ethical dilemmas and a need to have difficult conversations as part of their work it seems imperative to ensure that they feel supported in their roles and receive relevant training. Whilst they appear to have the equipment they need there does appear to be a gap in support from their managers. Further work could be done to enable this taking place.

Recommendation 28: Recognition of support to colleagues during daily roles could be explored considering whether allocation of time for support to team members / colleagues is possible to ensure the necessary resource is available.

4.4   Support from Managers

Less than two thirds of respondents (67% receive regular feedback from their managers and 56% have regular 1 to 1s with their managers. Government vets were more likely to have regular 1 to 1s with their manager (72%, compared with 44% private), as were office based vets (62%, compared with 46% of field vets).

Looking at the different groups, the majority (81%) of respondents who work from home reported that they receive regular feedback, which is positive, however from those based in offices 65% reported to receive regular feedback.

78% of respondents believe their managers are open to their ideas, which contrasts with the 51% who feel they are valued at work (see section above). Although almost a quarter (22%) felt their managers were not open to their ideas.

At team level, 84% of respondents believe they are supported by their wider team, with 17% not feeling supported. There was no direct question about being supported by their managers as the survey intended to pick this up via questions on feedback and 1:1 meetings, however, given the difference in respondents feeling supported by the wider team it may be worth following this up to see if it includes management in case the support is present from managers in ways other than 1:1s or feedback. This is shown in **Figure 5**.
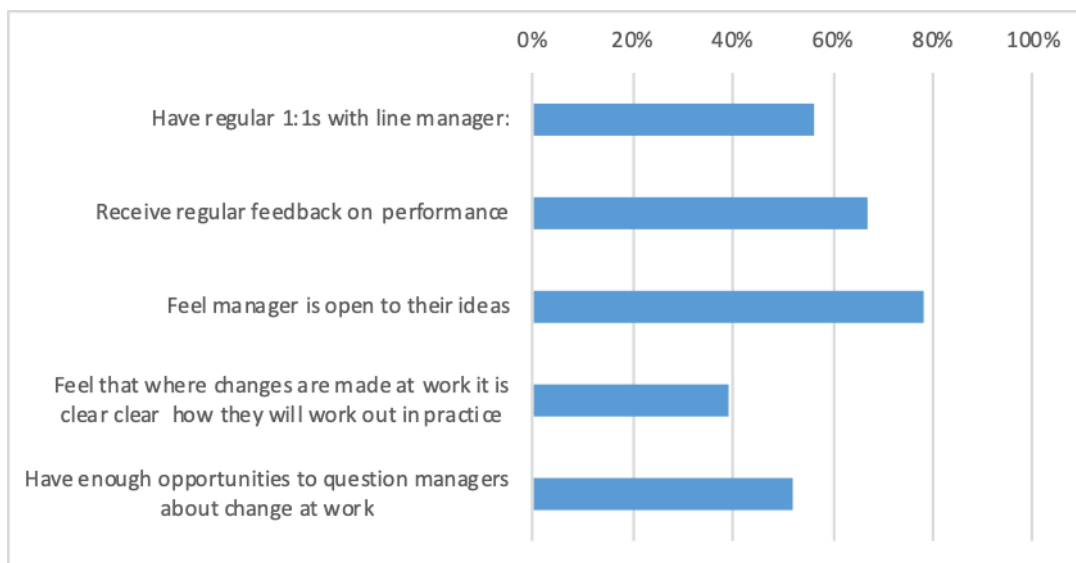

Figure 5: A figure showing the breakdown of discussion with managers and the proportion of staff who receive this.

Recommendation 29: Explore provision of management training on empathy, stress awareness, how to motivate a team and any other related courses.

4.5   Physical and Mental Health

Over the previous six months 82% of respondents have completed work outside of contracted hours that could not be finished during normal hours. The majority of respondents reported this is happening on a weekly basis (40%), with 17% saying this was a daily occurrence.

67% of respondents have attended work during the previous six months despite being unwell.

40% of respondents believe their roles have led to mental health problems such as depression or anxiety, but only 50% of those reported they sought treatment for the problem(s). 84 respondents reported taking time off work because of a mental health condition. This is seen in **Table 11**.

	Percentage
Attended work while emotionally or psychologically unwell (during the past six months)	67%
Role has led to a mental health condition	40%
Sought treatment for a mental health condition*	25% (43%)
Time off work for a mental health condition*	10% (24%)

*Main number is a percentage of all respondents, number in brackets is only of those who reported that their role has led to a mental health condition

Table 11: **Proportion of recipients reporting mental health issues and the responding consequences of this.**

54% of respondents reported that they are aware of resources available to support against stress and wellbeing issues.

60% of respondents are aware of negative social media relating to their work areas, and almost half of those (49%) state that negative social media impacts on their personal resilience.

The final section of the survey was free text and allowed respondents to share tasks that have affected their wellbeing. The text analysis word cloud highlighted work related terms such as management, clients, farmers, long hours or work load as well as animal welfare and TB testing which links up to the themes in the wellbeing section above. This is shown in Figure 6.

Call FBO Share Dangerous Involved High Volumes Actions Report
TB Testing Badger Clients Long Hours Farmers
Example Management Think Vets Late
Work Load Useless Going Not Applicable Animal Welfare
Preparation Consider Carried Task Training

Figure 6: Word cloud with key words in the free-text responses when asked to share tasks that have affected their wellbeing. The larger the word, the more frequently it is mentioned

206 respondents (minus 71 who added non-applicable or a note to explain they were unable to redact the examples) provided examples of tasks affecting their wellbeing which included:

- TB testing / badger control
- Work related accidents
- Bad press/ complaints where they tried their best or simply do their job
- Client complaints / client issues (e.g.. no payment)
- Professional judgement issues with colleagues
- Lack of support by organisation / management
- Diagnosis and advice versus what happens in reality due to economic pressure or clients choice
- Lack of support/training on the job
- Abuse, bullying and harassment
- High workload, working extra hours due to lack of resources / out of hours work
- Mass culling / euthanasia
- Instructions / conflicting advice
- Lack of appreciation of hard work by others
- Complex animal welfare cases /poor care of animals leading to euthanasia
- Impact of control measures on farmers

Further information related to workload was included by some respondents as free text, asking for more flexible working implementation, with an option to take time in lieu, rather than only payment. Those working in slaughterhouses/TB testing asked for workload time limits to be established as they felt the amount of overtime they are expected to undertake is unreasonable. The number of animals tested per vet / per day should also be capped as one respondent noted they have tested very large numbers of animals single-handed on their own more than once.

Recommendation 30: *Provide guidance on maximum expected hours per week and practical support in work scheduling and prioritisation.*

Recommendation 31: *Provide guidance on the maximum number of cattle that one vet could be expected to test for tuberculosis per day.*

Appendix 1: List of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: employers could raise awareness of or, where not available, establish workplace policies to support veterinarians when faced with violence and/or aggression at the work place

Recommendation 2: employers could raise awareness of or, where not available, establish dynamic risk assessment training.

Recommendation 3: employers could develop or make available more practical training delivered by experienced staff by identifying areas where vets feel training is lacking and considering multiple ways of providing support/training.

Recommendation 4: review on-farm testing safety and whether there are examples of best practice that can be applied in order to reduce incidents.

Recommendation 5: review accident reporting and follow up with an action to simplify systems and ensure follow up action or a review with a forward plan is taken following reports.

Recommendation 6: consider whether equipment risk assessments are necessary and if yes, how can staff be encouraged/incentivised to risk assess their equipment

Recommendation 7: veterinary employers should develop, raise awareness and implement lone working policies and walk away policies when employees are faced with dangerous situations.

Recommendation 8: ensure sufficient staff are available to comply with lone worker policies or reschedule visits.

Recommendation 9: investigate why almost a quarter of respondents do not receive support when there are known threats.

Recommendation 10: identifying the different stressors affecting vets and designing tailored support coping tools/training could be helpful for those that are not already available (i.e. there is already information on bullying and harassment but perhaps not so much for coping with witnessing incidents, or animals in extreme suffering)

Recommendation 11: Explore staff management roles and how individuals are affected by the presence/absence of training to equip them for management roles.

Recommendation 12: Exploring further why veterinarians feel that they are not able to manage their time effectively may help to explore initiatives that could improve wellbeing and productivity.

Recommendation 13: Explore how to develop better levels of engagement between veterinarians and policy/operational colleagues.

Recommendation 14: The fact that less than half of respondents were aware of a briefing mechanism could add pressure to veterinarians and place them in a difficult position where their clients may have more knowledge than them about the government lines. Measures should be in place to ensure all vets undertaking work for the government are adequately briefed and aware of public lines relevant to their role.

Recommendation 15: All stakeholder public communications should be circulated to vets working in the area in advance or, as a minimum, at the same time the announcement is released to stakeholder or other government officials.

Recommendation 16: Review communications affecting government veterinarians work areas and how these are managed to ensure veterinarians are aware and engaged as necessary

Recommendation 17: It would be helpful to identify which subsets of employees are not clear about the practical impact of changes at work, and whether this could be remedied.

Recommendation 18: Given that almost a quarter of vets are not aware if they have professional indemnity insurance it would be helpful to better communicate this to vets, and to investigate why 14% of them are not covered by professional indemnity/insurance.

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Recommendation 20: Review career progression opportunities within government and access restrictions of local authority/contract veterinarians to agency and central government vet roles (and vice versa).

Recommendation 21: More could be done to explore this feeling of isolation and see if there are ways to make vets undertaking government roles feel less isolated.

Recommendation 22: Consider developing team building exercises, particularly for field staff.

Recommendation 23: Consider arranging sessions for government vets and their teams similar to those being led by the RCVS under the Mind Matters initiative about mental health and how to recognise colleagues who may be experiencing mental health issues.

Recommendation 24: Explore in more detail whether vets working in an office environment feel they are treated with more respect than those working in a field environment and why.

Recommendation 25: *It is of key importance that the key role undertaken by the veterinary workforce is recognised accordingly. Identifying ways as to how this could be better than would be a first step to resolve ongoing concerns about lack of recognition and feeling undervalued by many veterinarians working within government.*

Recommendation 26: *Provision of more support (emotionally, psychologically and physically) should be made available to those involved in major, high profile events. It would also prove beneficial to ensure that these support mechanisms are advertised as widely as possible amongst those taking part, so they can avail themselves of the support as soon as possible, and amongst the wider veterinary community.*

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Recommendation 30: *Provide guidance on maximum expected hours per week and practical support in work scheduling and prioritisation.*

Recommendation 31: *Provide guidance on the maximum number of cattle that one vet could be expected to test for tuberculosis per day.*

Recommendation 32: *Review pay of government vet salaries and fees in comparison with fees provided to other professionals such as medics or private vet practitioners.*

Appendix 2 – Additional points raised by respondents.[1]

At the end of the survey respondents had the opportunity to include any other information they would like to contribute towards this scoping survey. 185 participants replied and 520 skipped this option. From the responses received 31 of them did not have any comment, simply a no or non-applicable response. Those which had provided additional input to existing queries have been integrated (where relevant). The rest highlighted a number of common themes shared between different respondents. They are summarised below:

1. Training:

Some respondents raised the need to have basic undergraduate aptitude and experience recruitment requirements to ensure veterinarians of the future are able to communicate and handle high stress/pressure environments with far less exclusive academic rigour and increased resilience.

Concerns around the privatisation of OV training and the revalidation (renewal) system were flagged. Respondents raised concerns in relation to the balance between training requirements, nature of the job and financial reward. Some felt that the OV revalidation system was unrealistic when looking at the overall number of cases / animals seen within low risk areas, although they found online training 'good and worthwhile'. Some felt revalidation was too frequent and expensive and that it had led to increased stress levels, aggravated by the some of the timings of revalidation (i.e. spring after poor weather during March one year) coinciding with the busiest season for farm animal vets. Overall they felt this may lead to a decrease in the number or OVs available to carry out surveillance.

Reflective CPD recording was found to be helpful by one respondent and a suggestion for more OV-related training (e.g. passports) was included.

2. On farm welfare and Conflicts of Interest

Some participants expanded on the challenges to manage farm animal welfare whilst providing services to clients. The example below highlights some of these challenges.

When it comes to farmed animal welfare, private veterinary practice will always have a conflict of interest. I have discussed with many practice directors the way ahead when dealing with farms which fail to meet the basic needs of their animals. There is motivation to help the farmer improve welfare, but when this is repeatedly tried and

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[1] The text in this appendix reflects survey responses and not necessarily the views of the Association of Government Vets or its members.

failed there is no possibility of a further step. Should a practice "report" one of its farms, the local farming community will feel betrayed rather than supported. We as an industry need APHA and trading standards to pick up on comments in a TB test submission such as "lots of missing ear tags" as there is a distinct correlation between poor recording and animal welfare and food safety. Take this opportunity to visit farms, and those making the visit need to have a sound background in working on the farming side rather than the clip board side of the industry to allow a proportionate dialogue to happen

3. Feeling Undervalued or Misunderstood

Some respondents felt that the situation at work has worsened in the last two years, and is in crisis, with almost no job satisfaction left for them as a result of management not listening to ideas for improvement/change and disillusioned staff not feeling valued.

Respondents enumerated a number of work challenges:

- physical threats at work, offensive treatment, threats
- emotional situations of distress seen on a regular basis (bad smells, noise, dangerous environment, long distance travelling (increased with this less resource situation, identifying and witnessing animal welfare cases),
- situations of social or economic precariousness

but felt there was *"no palpable recognition in any way"* nor awareness of how stressful and difficult these are. A feeling of a blame culture system, described as "*pass the bag downwards*" *before compromising my own wellbeing*" was mentioned. They also noted that at times measures are not taken against difficult and abusive clients but instead "pandered to" placing additional pressure on and distress on staff.

TB testing is underpaid and extremely stressful as an OV, we are often between a rock and a hard place with clients. I enjoy my work as a farm vet, and enjoy my day to day contact with farmers through testing, but it can be very stressful, I would definitely never work on a foot & mouth cull again, or volunteer to do that work again

Some felt the role of veterinarians is often undervalued and that having veterinary skills / qualification, have at times become a handicap rather than an asset as they are felt to restrict people to veterinary tasks only, rather than becoming an asset showing that vets can be multitalented individuals with a wide range of skills and knowledge.

One comment highlighted that they felt there was poor visibility of the role and relevance of veterinarians within some government departments many communication messages usually avoiding the use of the word "veterinary" (and related words such veterinarian).

Some respondents felt very well respected and supported by their immediate team and line manager. However they didn't feel valued or respected by the higher levels of management or their government department / Agency itself. The feeling by many was that this was also reflected in the salary which was not considered to be comparable to equally qualified and experienced vets working in other sectors or indeed other professionals such as lawyers.

A feeling of emphasis been put upon reaching targets rather than the quality or outcome of the work and staff wellbeing came through in several responses. Some described this by saying:

> *As such I often feel that a robot could do my job rather than needing a vet who is capable of making judgements. With regard to my work, I consider myself a vet first and a civil servant second and I feel that this attitude is lacking within the agency to the detriment of animal welfare. There are too many 'yes men/women' who play the system and are promoted as they have never made any mistakes because they have never made a decision. If nobody challenges anything (when necessary) then nothing ever changes for the better.*

Government structural changes were felt to not help vets, with a downgrade of veterinary posts to lower pay scale grades or the implementation of new work procedures. Some noted that there is conflict within what the business as usual work entails and that discussed within operational delivery network areas.

The feeling of lack of support was repeated through multiple responses, and many felt a lack of understanding from management about the realities of the work was one of the main triggers. There was a feeling of a lack of a holistic approach and a lack of understanding of some veterinary jobs which caused managerial disengagement with the realities of veterinary work, creating tensions and conflicts with workloads (e.g.: ease/difficulty or how long it takes to do each task leaving no time to complete relevant paperwork). A feeling that there are "*unreasonable expectations of what can be realistically achieved*" was expressed. Some noted they were looking to leave their current government organisation and work elsewhere as soon as a suitable vacancy arises.

Several felt that the privatisation of some government veterinary roles, including TB work or slaughterhouse inspections, has affected the Official Veterinarian status, decreasing the value of official veterinary roles and seen as degrading the veterinary profession "*recklessly trading with lives and livelihoods without any accountability*". Some respondents included very open responses and stated:

> *I have been an OV for 25 years and have never felt less valued or supported by [a government department].*

The reality is that it feels like the "boat is sinking" with the captain calmly explaining that it is not! There is a general impression that people are less and less valued over giving an impression to the outside that everyone is merry and everything is under control.

There was also a feeling that government departments are treating contractors that are carrying out official duties differently from the directly employed staff and this was not seen as acceptable. Vets in practice undertaking contract work for government felt there was no full appreciation of large veterinary practice work.

Some of my colleagues past and present have ended up in hospital trying to do on farm test. One farmer ended up dead after being hit by a bull despite being airlifted to hospital. Another lady was taken by ambulance after being hit by bull beef bulls. The office response was why the test was not completed (…) it would be nice, even humbling to see someone say thanks even once

Some were concerned that being a veterinarian with excellent technical/clinically skills has become completely unimportant within government veterinary services with decision makers undermining the role of vets (including downgrading the CVO roles and responsibilities). A strong feeling expressing concerns about the loss of Veterinary Investigation Services was cited as an example of this.

Replacement of management with veterinary qualifications was named as one of the potential reasons that has led to a lack of appreciation for how complex and multifactorial veterinary work is, shifting expectations to unrealistic work demand levels, no longer controlling livestock diseases, but mainly processes and data (which is flawed)

4. Lack of support

A respondent noted that it would be helpful to have increased support mechanism within the veterinary community to deal with stress and anxiety. They felt there was a lack of people to discuss issues with and not much support from managers who *"just had to get on with it"* in their day so the family ended up dealing with most of the work-related emotional breakdowns.

Increased workloads and understaffing were noted by multiple respondents as an ongoing problem having an effect on work/life balance of vets, with some thinking that a cost-cutting management culture was leading to work load increase and recruitment of vets who were prepared to accept lower salaries. A feeling that "*There does not seem to be any regard for the profession from a financial perspective*" was stated. Comments noted that the pressure was on vets, rather than those planning/facilitating the inspections for them and suggested changes like correlating notification timings between vet letter deadlines and farmer announcement timelines.

Some of the responses reflected a lack of respect, the use of abusive language and lack of support were also mentioned by many, some providing examples as to how this was the reason why they left their jobs

> *I was given very little support and understanding of the stress I was under on a daily basis for well over 2 years - near the very end I was referred for an occupational health review but the company still failed to support and understand the social anxiety I was now suffering as a result I hit bottom suffering complete mental and physical fatigue which lead to over 4 months off work and I resigned due to lack of good practice management and support*

Lack of personalised support was also mentioned. In a role where there is a lot of lone/home working it was noted that this can be very isolating and resilience skills were identified as key.

Respondents raised concerns that communication between the government veterinary departments and OVs in practice and stakeholders such as farmers has become very poor and is now unacceptable but there are no clear mechanism of raising these issues at organizational level. An example provided was government announcements reaching stakeholders before government vets, downgrading their professional status and making them appear "*out of the loop*". Others noted that whilst "problems raised might be acknowledged but rarely changed or rectified".

Change management was raised by some, noting that changes are usually imposed with no consultation or warning to allow time for adjustments / handovers.

Some felt that, whilst managers were aware of the severity of some of the animal welfare incidents vets were involved in they were oblivious to any effect it had on them and remained focused on delivery and completion of paperwork referring to this as "*administration dominant management*". No support nor sources of help were made available or suggested to them and deadlines given were not always accompanied by support to deal with difficult cases. A respondent felt that there is "*currently no effective regional leadership and that line management can be considered poor and little empathetic*" other reflected similar feelings by stating there was a 'lack of clear line of command'. Some felt their organisation had lost effectiveness as a result of changes and were concerned about current capabilities to deal, for example, with major notifiable disease outbreaks. Others believed their employers' main objective was how to grow their income and there is no interest for the employee's wellbeing,

Some respondents with non-veterinary direct line management reported that there is a lack of technical support from non-vet managers; a suggestion for a return to a veterinary management structure and allowing government vets to do field visits so they can gain experience was included in a response. This was intended to assist, for example vets from other countries who may have limited knowledge of the insights of British livestock industry, placing them at a disadvantage in their roles and leading to "*misunderstanding, frustration and anxiety for all concerned*".

Some felt recent changes had impacted on stress levels and mental health issues and hindered their career to the point they see no option for alternatives:

> *for the last few years, this has changed to the point where I feel very unable to switch off and have a massive backlog of work, so much so that I end up working on flexi days to try to clear some of the work to stop me thinking about it; I am told it is OK to miss deadlines but when I do, I get told to clear the deadline and sort it out. My employer is no longer a good place to work and I would not recommend anyone to work in this environment. Leaving is not a current option as I am now totally deskilled in other areas of veterinary work with no time to develop alternative careers or hobbies.*

Overall most felt that vets are working without proper professional support to do their jobs, with very little training and induction. They felt this causes stress and disaffection.

One respondent flagged up bullying issues with a specific senior individual within their organisation and noted this was very difficult to tackle despite many people being aware of it as they did not feel safe to challenge.

An employer's expectation to deliver work at any time during day and night shifts at the lowest pay-rate offered within the UK for vets was noted. A feeling that performance management is done in a negative manner so there is no salary increase was also reported.

Day to day phone or email assistance was not always available in a timely manner, although no specific detail was provided of the type of issues not been resolved.

Improved communications from government departments to veterinary staff were suggested as at times farmers were better informed than vets.

A newly recruited vet undertaking work for government as part of a job in private practice thought there was a lack of support for vets giving farmers bad news every day with respect to specific disease control measures.

> *I'm heartbroken every time I shut down a herd, the impact is massive to so many people and the farmers are obviously devastated. My boss and colleagues are brilliant and always there to boost moral when tests are going badly but I feel this has the biggest negative impact on my mental health and would be the most likely reason for me to leave the industry. I think the government should have more support in place to help vets (…) help farmers who are also struggling.*

Some flagged that different work areas have different challenges and that field work in particular can result in a feeling of isolation and also a lack of support from higher management due to a poor training structure.

A respondent felt that I feel that vets working in abattoirs are neither supported by the governmental bodies nor by RCVS

Monthly supervision sessions with an external supervisor to ensure any concerns are regularly addressed and that individuals feel supported was a suggestion put forward by one respondent to increase support mechanisms.

5. Financial concerns

Respondents noted that the veterinary profession has changed, with most clients not aware of or wanting gold standard treatment due to cost with pressure on vets to balance this with doing the best they can for the patient. Financial requirements for the provision of shareholders and the constant threat of litigation has made a good professional career a walk on a tightrope, with one's mental state and wellbeing paying the cost.

Private practitioners felt OV services and current contract systems on offer are not financially viable, leading to "*a shortage of staff alongside a depressed, demoralised and disillusioned work force*".

Many noted that fees for government veterinary work are too low and that this has an impact on the respect for veterinarians in this industry.

> *I perform a very professional role on a salary that no other professional would regard as even barely adequate.*

Some felt that there was ongoing pressure to reduce salaries and that this has led on several occasions to replacing experienced vets on higher pay grades with staff prepared to undertake the same role with a lower salary. The feeling that government work has been "*increasingly poorly paid with contracts being awarded to low cost operators*" was cited by several respondents. Some felt EU-exit would remove lower cost labour vets and force a return to past structures providing veterinary surgeons with increased value and respect as professionals.

The lack of pay (or low pay) for extra working hours and 'on-call' was also raised noting some organisations referred to "*loyalty to the Company 'family*" keeping the employee levels *"permanently slightly understaffed so it's really difficult to finish all the work within working hours.*"

Some felt sub-contractor systems have a "lack of value placed on the demanding work" carried out and feel they are "subsidising government work". Respondents reported that the level of paperwork, record keeping, training, revalidation etc. has risen exponentially (not a bad thing), however the remuneration has dropped considerably. They believe this is a reflection of how poorly valued a demanding and sometimes dangerous job is. An example provided was a fee of £24 for an anthrax case which includes up to two hours of travel time, transport costs and equipment

requirements. Another example is the out-of-hours surveillance allowance for government official vets which is £7.99 for week days and £22.72 for weekends and bank holidays, with a 15-minute call response required

> *I feel trapped - continue to do government(stressful and demanding) and lose money to the business for every task completed or give up government work but risk my business with the inevitable loss of clients in an annual testing area to a vet that does government work.*

> *You cannot have it both ways - highly skilled professionals being told how critical their work is and why we need to maintain our skills and then pay us less than we charge to give a dog a kennel cough vaccine. It is unsustainable but I doubt anybody cares. What a sad state of affairs. No wonder there are so many mental health issues in our sector*

Some respondents concluded that working in public health is not a business.

Recommendation 32: review pay of government vet salaries and fees in comparison with fees provided to other professionals such as medics or private vet practitioners.

6. Working hours / resources

Some respondents asked for more flexible working implementation, with an option to take time in lieu, rather than only payment. Those working in slaughterhouses / TB testing asked for workload time limits to be established as they felt the amount of overtime they are expected to undertake is unreasonable. The number of animals tested per vet / per day should also be capped as one respondent noted they have tested very large numbers of animals single-handed on their own more than once.

On the other hand some felt that, having worked in both private practice and for government as a vet, the government role allowed them with more time with their family and a slightly better work life balance. Further respondents felt that "*having control over one's own time and being able to work from home helps combat a busy and sometimes stressful job*"

Some respondents intimated that, as a result of high workload they had to complete admin / paperwork at home, often late and found it difficult to find time to complete continuous professional development. They also noted that, whilst other factors, such as bullying, have triggered mental health issues, overwork over a long period has aggravated this.

Efficiencies on certain tasks and deadlines for certain reporting activities where noted as unnecessary and perhaps this could be explored further to find specific examples and free up workload time.

The workload and timing of contract tests in a short space of time were reported as "*very demanding and stressful*" especially when they were required to use specific time slots or members of staff. Difficulties in recruitment of large animal vets was noted, especially for small practice in high frequency testing areas.

One respondent noted difficulties with equipment and the facilities they work within, specifying that:

> *In some instances I can't perform my job properly because there's no equipment which cannot be acquired because of constant budget cuts. This makes the job stressful, disappointing, demoralising and in some occasion embarrassing with customers, visitors and students.*

An overload of information via email was also noted by one respondent as a factor that makes it difficult to identify priority communications. Inefficient IT systems and business processes were also mentioned as contributing factors adding to an already high workload and causing further frustration for staff.

Overall, current workloads for government vets were seen as unacceptable by many suggesting they are "*resulting in mental health problems in veterinary and other staff*".

7. Recognition of colleagues / employer

Respondents were in general very positive about their colleagues and the overall support received. They appeared to appreciate discussion with "empathetic colleagues" more than online resources, for example:

> *A long lunch in the pub with those that shared the traumatic experience better than any counselling.*

Some felt their employer cared about their wellbeing, although they added that new structures exchanges mean that "*vets are now isolated with occasional contact with managers and not being able to see the big picture*". Others reported feelings of not been part of a wider team, with vets been now spending more time alone, whilst some stated that, having come from private practice they feel the support and structure offered by their current government employer is really excellent and they view them very positively.

> *We are no longer part of a team of admin, animal health officers and vets which means that a lot of the camaraderie that kept us going is now lost. We work a lot on*

our own or from home which is not good for our mental wellbeing. I am fortunate that I have my faith otherwise I would have had a breakdown several years ago

Statements asking to have managers who are also vets so they can understand the role better were repeated by a number of respondents. With many expressing in different ways difficulties and frustration to explain and discuss veterinary medicine tasks to non-vet management.

Having colleagues to talk to and a good team was a clear preference of many respondents.

I am very lucky to work with a very good team that values team work and I generally feel supported.

Respondents came from a wide pool of government and non-government departments so further research is needed to identify working structures that are working well versus those that received negative feedback in the different organisations.

8. Career progression issues

Some noted that the recruitment system is "*too corporate orientated instead of putting the accent on one's clinical capabilities*". Others noted recruitment freeze policies of higher veterinary roles, followed by recruitment of lower grade vets to undertake the same role later in time. This was seen as a restriction of career progression for vets within the organisation

A respondent noted that vets working for Local Authorities are treated unfairly in not having similar access to central government vet jobs because there is no mechanism for LA vets to apply internally. They felt that expertise of their roles dealing with public and animal health issues provides them with relevant knowledge of animal and public health legislation which could be beneficial to central government roles. overall a waste.

9. Suggested survey Improvements/feedback

The free-text section also attracted comments related to the survey. Some felt the survey was designed mainly for field vets rather than those working in laboratories or research facilities. Several felt that a 1-5 scale, or an option for 'occasional/sometimes' rather than a yes / no answer would have been more appropriate in some questions.

Several welcomed the survey noting it was very timely and that they were pleased to see engagement with this important topic, particularly at a time where many feel stretched with high workloads and little additional resources to fulfil them.

> *I think it is great that more emphasis is being placed on personal wellbeing, in particular for government vets. A lot of us come from a generation where it was considered a weakness to admit to a mental health problem - and an organisation that didn't know how to manage and prevent such problems. I feel in a much better place knowing that the organisational culture places a great awareness behind personal wellbeing. I am much less likely to allow my own stress levels to escalate and take time off as a result. I have shown that I can remain productive even whilst under extreme stress. I am also willing to assist others who may be experiencing stressful incidents etc.*

Some noted that their government work was minimal in comparison to other work they undertake and the survey, or some specific questions, were not very relevant to them (i.e. Most in private practice, undertaking contract work for government departments, do not have line managers, or managers or formal feedback). Some also noted that some of the negative aspects were more related to the private practice aspects of their work. Others noted that, having undertaken different roles in Government, their replies would differ from one post to another (i.e. office-based versus field work).

The questionnaire listed some organisations / government departments in the initial questions and some noted they felt it was not appropriate to name organisations. These names have been replaced by 'contractor' in the final report to avoid feelings of discrimination of the particular companies named.

One respondent felt that some questions elicit answers that are ambiguous and that the survey should have been inspected by a psychological assessor. Another respondent felt questions could have been included to draw on more positive work aspects.

Others felt that this survey added to their already busy workload and felt this was a distraction from their daily tasks. One in particular pointed out that the extensive number of questions might have deterred some from completing the survey.

A respondent felt that this survey was not well known among staff and felt it would have been useful to disseminate it further.

A query as to whether the information attained by this survey would actually have a meaningful input to policy was included in the free text boxes. The general feeling was that this has not been the case with any government assessments made over the last 15-20 years.

Appendix 3: Text Comments [2]

The bullets below summarise free text responses, with direct quotes from participants.

1. Health and Safety

1.1. Challenges and Support
No free-text quotes

1.2. Training
- Lack of training or training available but no time / staff, resource / budget to attend if training is available but workload is too high and time consuming to then be able to give up any additional time on training - difficult to go on CPD due to arranging childcare and cost (pro-rated allowance)
- Manual of instructions difficult to navigate - if new instructions are brought in, there is often not enough time to read them; rarely do we have training in relation to new instructions
- Vague instructions
- Constantly changing e.g. IT systems, working procedures - some training available but no time available to do it
- No clear induction programme - inadequate introduction to the practices and routines at my particular place of work
- Lack of practical training; plenty of theoretical training but less practical training. Not enough opportunities to get practical training for specific tasks
- Basic training is good; refresher training doesn't occur frequently enough. Basics are ok but updates and changes poor; a lot of online training which gives no opportunity for discussion and doesn't consider people's different learning styles. It is a tick-box exercise for management sometimes.
- Not enough training provided for some work areas; not enough ongoing support when certain problems arise (no senior vets based in my office; only very occasional, insufficient senior vets visits) I suppose I am still in the development phase. I am expected a lot more than I can deliver at the moment and the pressure is high
- Poor quality training - the training is usually "thrown at us" along with the responsibility to "catch it". The standard of training package and the quality of retention and value related to need in the field is usually only assessed by

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[2] The text in this appendix reflects survey responses and not necessarily the views of the Association of Government Vets or its members.

those who have never or no longer do the job. Also most of the training focuses on the procedures rather than the people or even the purposes involved

- Training delivered by less experienced staff. In our region {edited} the lack of value put on the experienced colleagues have resulted in a massive movement out of the organisation, as a result the training has been carried out by unexperienced people {edited}.

- Employer restrictions to attend training I've asked several times for my employer to let me undertake different professional training, but they never give me the opportunity to follow these. Also, they never offered me any chances to develop my professional career

- Training lacking in specific areas – those named were: IT, enforcement procedures and collecting evidence; poultry / pig welfare for big units; less common exotic diseases and differential diagnosis and management. Much of the training is generic and sometimes is difficult to get approval for veterinary specialist training

- Often I am asked to do new tasks that I have not been prepared for, nor received any training for

- Very often we are required to train in our own time at our own expense. in order to be prepared for work tasks we face

- Accidents and Near Misses

- Our practice has an accident book but we're encouraged not to report in it {edited} mostly because it legally would demand a response {edited} staff morale is very low both veterinary and lay staff

- Self cert form says if absence due to industrial injury, must fill out incident report form, if less physical injury, more mental / stress etc. it doesn't seem appropriate to full an incident report form

- I have never been informed of the possibility, need, opportunity and procedures how to do it

- Minor injury while working with live animals. I considered it not serious enough to deserve the time and effort, given low likelihood of constructive changes and low level of ongoing risk and severity

- I think there is some reluctance due to individual managers' responses and perhaps an anxiety about turning the issue back on the victim rather than a supportive approach.

- I experienced a long time of workload and stress, and reported it to my manager who apparently could not help me because of lack of resources. But I also noticed he did not have the appropriate management skills to empathise with me or help me to delegate. So I was even more frustrated because I felt I was wasting my time. Therefore, if I do not report sometimes, it is because I do not notice any improvement after doing so.

- Near misses happen all the time in large animal practice. It is the nature of the job. If I reported every single one, I'd write in the book 2-3 times a week at least.
- They are too numerous to mention thanks to TB testing. Near misses occur almost every TB test. Dangerous work for which we are paid a pittance.
- Injuries in the line of duty are so regular that reporting everyone would be too burdensome.
- It's just one of those things, a risk of working on farm.
- Tend to only report serious incidents. Minor injuries and near misses happen too frequently.
- You are the "enemy" here, you are the one that see the animals like beings not production parts...we do not report all the abuse we suffer because it will make the situation invariable.

1.3. Equipment

No free-text quotes

1.4. Hazards and Customer Interactions

- We have been working on our own for years. This issue is made into a big issue when it should not be. Private vets work alone and so do we.
- We often work alone, and it is not an issue. I assume the question relates to staff who work alone in challenging environments that could put them at risk? This is extremely rare in our work.
- Always have two of us on farm. At the moment because of lack of staff we have are often on farm solo.
- There is a stated lone worker policy particularly for office workers in a government department {edited} but it is rarely adhered to in my experience. I have often worked alone for long hours in order to complete the work required. I have not been pressurised to do this, but due to the high work-load and unrelenting tempo in the {edited} department at present means in an under-staffed team I have no option if I want to keep supporting my department {edited}.
- In my case I am lone worker). The way company "assists" is by sending emails with no exact answers but general indications {edited}. It seems that those mails serve for them to have justification for them to have information and not to do anything.
- There are measures in place for lone working but I think that they are ignored or not actively pursued by most of us.

2. Wellbeing at the Workplace

2.1. Workload and Working Strategy
No free-text quotes

2.2. Ethics

- Closing down herds with TB. Sending reactors for TB. Having TB testing interfering with your usual clinical work due to the time demands and poor set up of farmers. Meaning that animals are escaping/taking you too long to test. People being knocked over by animals.

- Farmers getting frustrated with cattle on TB tests and hitting them etc. harder than I am comfortable with but not for so long / to such a level that I felt able to make an issue of it.

- Too numerous client distress, euthanasia, neglect, client financial hardship colleague / employee lack of resilience. Government corruption and mismanagement in particular with regard to TB.

- 1) Severe welfare case where animals were left to die through lack of feed and water. 2) Euthanasing heavily pregnant cows when calf inside struggled before death. 3) Weak sheep that had been predated - eyes pecked out and it remained alive. 4) Photograph shown to me by colleague of cow that had been deliberately wounded by a farmer - the vet concerned euthanased the animal immediately - the photographs are still imprinted in my mind although it was >10 years ago (too unpleasant to describe here). 5) Stock keeper who horded animals, she had certain mental health issues and was unable to look after them but she was very bonded to her livestock and it was distressing to see her feeling we were taking away her "friends". She rejected support from social services."

- Have witnessed and experienced distressing situations. I've seen previous managers being bullied, I've been bullied myself, I am being micromanaged with every decision I take being second guessed. Some team leaders have no people skills and expect employees to do as they say, no questions asked because "they run the show" {edited text}.

- Assault on self by farmer, extreme verbal abuse by farmer, appalling welfare problems with animal suffering, highly emotional situations with farmers experiencing bereavement, financial ruin, family disputes and us having to enforce legislation in these situations.

- Many welfare cases involve distressing situations and history, not only for animals but the persons involved on both sides. Usually there is an illness, loneliness, lack of finance or opportunities to improve the situation/move forward. This also apply to some TB case work"

- "WELFARE CASES BUT HUMAN ISSUES UNABLE ASSIST"

- "Road traffic accident with dog and owner trapped in car. I had to euthanasia dog in situ. Driver died whilst I was doing this.

- Neglect / abuse of pets. Senior staff treating other staff without respect or professionalism. Clients behaving rudely to our team e.g. racism, aggressive behaviour, sexism etc.
- Farmers devastated and crying because of disease control situations.
- As part of the field vet role we need to deliver the policy on farms and also bad news in terms of removing extra animals for TB control purposes, which can become a very distressful for both the vet and the customer. Also during welfare investigations, we have difficult conversation and challenging situations that can cause a high level of anxiety and pressure.
- Various situations from distressing situations with animal welfare and also mental health issues with clients which have confided in me at visits.
- Farmers in very challenging mental issues, abusive people and distressed individuals.
- Slaughter without stunning Animal abuse / welfare cases - for example a lamb with the tail full of maggots - the photography shop made a comment in the envelope of the photos printed asking to flag similar content as sensitive in the future to avoid upsetting their staff members.
- Verbal abuse and intimidation. Being asked if I was a "proper" vet and treated as a second class individual just for not being British. As a simple example one of the workplaces I visit has a sign put up by the Food Business Operator to the entrance of the {edited} office which reads "Foods Spanish Agency."
- People being rude, people being unreasonable, clients.
- Senior staff treating other staff without respect or professionalism. Clients behaving rudely to our team eg. racism, aggressive behaviour, sexism etc.
- Financial difficulties, pressure from industry, verbal abuse.
- Business Operator staff fighting with each other using knife.
- Aggressive clients. Demanding situations particularly involving people.
- Gender discrimination, so "nationality" discrimination.
- I have been bullied three times over the last 4 years.
- Plenty. From abuse to fellow colleagues, to this abuse actually being accepted as normal.
- On farm situations, confrontational experiences on farm and elsewhere.
- Sometime I have had to hang a call on due to farmer's abusive behaviours and I have witnessed situations where some colleagues have held a strong conversation with a customer.
- Disrespectful, nationalistic customers / farmers.
- Throwing objects across the slaughterhall (chopper and different things), swearing, shouting obscenities, obscene gestures.
- {Edited text} a specific example of a private veterinary expert allegedly working to discredit official veterinary advice to prevent enforcement taking place against their customer was reported. A formal complaint against the official vet followed. The official advice was robust and supported by the government department "*but indeed I went through a hard time*".

- Bullying and harassment at workplace, in multiple slaughterhouses. Working under stressful conditions, over 12 hours, driving unpaid for work between plant for more than 50 miles without accommodation.
- Distress is part of a carer's profession, if animals were always happy and healthy and transactions were flawless there would be no need for vets. Vets, doctors and other healthcare professionals always work in distressing environments. This question is therefore ill conceived and pointless.
- Am trained for seeing bad things with animals.
- I've been a vet for over 30 years so of course I have.
- If an ethically minded vet is not distressed by at least part of their work, then they probably aren't dealing with live animals.
- Same as every other vet.

2.3. Management
No free-text quotes

2.4. Engagement
No free-text quotes

2.5. Communications
No free-text quotes

2.6. Dealing with Change
No free-text quotes

2.7. Indemnity Insurance
No free-text quotes

2.8. Career Progression
No free-text quotes

3. Mental Health

3.1. Self-Esteem and Respect
No free-text quotes

3.2. Stress
- Yes, but there isn't enough ongoing mentoring or coaching support when complicated problems arise (no senior vets based in my office; only very occasional, insufficient senior vets visits). Emails can't always replace face to face discussions."
- Vet helpline but after that the support peters out. Mental health support via NHS is at best very delayed, limited and at worst made things worse. All that is offered is anti-depressants. Boss treats any mental health issue or stress as a reason to ramp up the pressure to get the employee to quit.

- Insofar as there is a list of colleagues with their specialist areas, but not regarding time and availability of "direct human contact" or for "shadowing" etc.... too short on staff.

- On paper it's all available but staff is overstretched and there's no time or resources for this.

- Tend to look for, and provide, support from / to most close peers. I think formal support seeking will be seen as a weakness and may be held against me.

- I am a vet, you have to be kidding with some of these questions.

- Employee support but not really for veterinary issues. All systems are in place but people are too busy so an individual cannot access them when they need to. Difficult conversations - yes I had training but it was about 20 years ago.

- As a previous government department employee, I went through FMD, suffered huge emotional impact, not immediately significant during the outbreak but years later led to anxiety and depression which required time off work during that employment period, however was also successfully treated and I now have a much better understanding of the impact that a situation like this can have on you. It has taken me 15 years to be able to talk about the FMD outbreak, and my biggest regret was not being given support at the time, and when my mental state was less than normal, being pushed out of the organisation for some decisions made which were no doubt influenced by the mental state I was in. I have huge regret that I did not raise this at the time and was too scared to ask for help, and that I felt exceptionally let down by the government, and my managers, who simply wanted the problems to go away. I should have had support, emotional and practical during this period, and this was very badly lacking. I also worked very closely with individuals in the service organisations during this period, and in spite of my role having a larger responsibility and impact, they were in receipt of all the support and knew what to expect of the staff involved, as there is a known psychological effect after such an incident, which follows a common pattern. This should have been recognised, should have been pre-empted by additional support, and those that were clearly struggling after this should have been given assistance. Given this, I have returned to government work now in a different role and hugely enjoy it, however I can see the same issues cropping up again, as there are still less than adequate mechanisms to pre-empt the development of post-traumatic stress. Eventually the current system will cause such substantial exodus of employees that the current grades and salaries will fail to attract any one to the roles, and the public health of the country will be put at risk. My view is that all veterinary services should be centralised again, and treated as a single veterinary department, with adequate line management support, cross development and job enrichment of staff, but also provide a substantial pool of experienced and resilient staff to draw on for incidents

- (Added as part of Q10, incidents and near misses) "I was harassed by one of the customer (farmer) and he was not much verbally aggressive, but was draining me mentally for months. He was what I felt was verbally abusive, but it was on the border therefore did not seemed "so bad" to others maybe... He would be using language as: that I am trying to destroy his business, I am cruel and vindictive... he was questioning all my actions despite that they were based on the policy. He was expecting me to work for him 24/7, writing emails all the time, and expecting that I answer immediately. He was copying all the correspondence to senior and ministerial level trying to make me look as I am not doing my job, being intimidating and trying to undermining me as professional. I was under pressure for six months, until finally I managed to find another job. I shared my concerns with my line manager, health and safety advisor and also with lead vets. However no appropriate support was provided. My employer {edited} has procedures for verbal abuse or aggressive actions, however when vets are constantly abused mentally, nothing is done about that. Vets suffer quietly, they are the ones always delivering "bad news" to the farmers. The pressure is unbelievable, and the vets are always blamed for everything going wrong in the field... please take this comments into consideration"

3.3.   Management and Support
No free-text quotes

3.4.   Physical and Mental Health
No free-text quotes

Appendix 4 - Acronyms

AGV   Association of Government Veterinarians

APHA   Animal and Plant Health Agency

FSA   Food Standards Agency

DAERA   Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Northern Ireland)

Defra   Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (England)

GVS   Government Veterinary Surgeons

OOH   Out of Hours

OV   Official Veterinarian

UK CVO United Kingdom Chief Veterinary Officer

VBF   Veterinary Benevolent Fund

VMD   Veterinary Medicines Directorate

VPHA   Veterinary Public Health Association