

Vet Webinars – Q&A

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Questions pertaining to the Annual Health and Welfare Review

Note: Annual Health and Welfare Review = ‘Review’

How the Review relates to different schemes.....

Question: *What should my advice be to a farmer who is already in an assurance or disease accreditation scheme?*

Answer: To still consider signing up for the Review. If a farmer is in a disease accreditation scheme there is nothing to stop them from arranging their Review for the time of year when they would need to do their testing for the scheme and use the Review for that. That’s a benefit to the farmer, and we (Defra) would benefit from learning more about the prevalence of these diseases.

If the farmer is already participating in an assurance scheme, then the Review would offer a chance to get in-depth advice on how to meet certain standards

Question: *Does this visit include the Red Tractor review - or does it need to be done separately?*

Answer: While you may arrange to do them on the same day, they are separate things with different objectives. The Review is intended to be an open conversation between the vet and farmer around the health and welfare issues on farm. This could include an in-depth discussion on issues highlighted in a Red Tractor inspection, as a complement to that activity.

Question: *How will this fit in with the BVDFree England scheme that's been in place for the last 6 years?*

Answer: The Review will provide funding for testing which should make it easier for more farmers to understand whether there's BVD in their herd and take action where appropriate. BVDFree and others have already made great progress and have been actively involved in co-designing the Pathway, particularly the BVD Control and Eradication approach which will launch after the Review.

Question: *farm assurance health planning will, in many cases, require a similar approach - can there be any link between the two or is the funding specific to the review only?*

Answer: the funding is for the Review. The Review is not intending to duplicate things that vets and farmers are doing already. For example, on a Red Tractor visit, a vet could identify a series of areas of improvement and could then use the Review to delve into the detail of those issues and offer advice to farmers. Colleagues in Red Tractor and other assurance schemes have been involved in the co-design.

It might be that a vet and farmer schedule a Red Tractor visit and Review over the same day. For example, starting with an assurance visit and moving into a Review. It is down to the vet and farmer to decide how to use their time effectively.

Eligibility.....

Question: *Does a farmer have to have a Review to participate in other parts of the Pathway?*

Answer: No, but we hope people will still see the value of the Review as a means of getting advice to make the most of the Pathway

Question: *Will a farmer need to be eligible for BPS to apply?*

Answer: At the point we open to applications in January this will be a requirement. But our intention is to remove this requirement as soon as we can.

Question: *Farmers are required to share their SBI number as a condition of applying for a Review. If a tenant farmer is eligible for BPS, but their landlord claims it, then they will most likely not know their SBI. Does this mean they won't be able to apply?*

Answer: Criteria are set out [here](#).

The Review process.....

Question: *Is there going to be a large admin burden on vets delivering the Review?*

Answer: The process has been designed to keep the admin burden on vets and farmers as low as possible. For example, we are not prescribing a format for the report related to the Review. Vets can use their own systems for that. Walking the farm and having quality conversations is what we want to be the main focus of the Review, not completing extensive paperwork.

Question: *I feel like I need more clarification on what information will need to be collected as part of the Review. Busy vet practices are compiling reports on farm health and welfare all the time; if you require access to this information the admin burden will be considerable. Should I be concerned about this?*

Answer: Vets will not be required to submit any information that pre-dates the Review as part of this process. We are focussed on ensuring the admin burden on both vets and farmers is as light as possible.

Question: *so, do we need to do 3 visits for sheep? 2 to take samples and 1 to discuss results?*

Answer: that is down to the vet to arrange with the farmer. On sheep farms there will be a need to take samples on 2 separate occasions.

Question: *can farmers with dairy, beef and sheep apply for funding for multiple species/enterprises at the same time?*

Answer: when we first open to eligible keepers in January, it will only be one Review per SBI. However, as quickly as possible, we will iterate to allow vets to carry out multiple Reviews if required where there are different species or multiple epidemiologically distinct herds/flocks.

Question: *is this just one-off funding? You said farmers apply and complete within 6 months, what happens after that with follow ups, for example? Will farmers have to cover that cost?*

Answer: the Review will be funded by government for 3 years at which point we will review next steps. Farmers can have 1 Review each year for an eligible herd/flock and would be responsible for any costs of additional work outside of the Review. In some

cases further support may be available over time, such as Animal Health & Welfare capital grants and endemic disease control and eradication programmes.

Question: *regarding worm egg counting: does the farmer take the samples and the vet visit following the 2nd sample results or should the vet be involved in taking the samples?*

Answer: the vet should be involved in taking samples to ensure the samples are high quality. All of that is set out in the guidance (to be published in January).

Question: *it is suggested that the Review will take 2-3 hours, as long as we complete the required reports and testing can it be done more quickly?*

Answer: It needs to be 2-3 hours, plus the time it takes to collect samples.

Question: *Does the Review vet need to be the regular vet for the farm?*

Answer: It is a vet of the farmers choice. We are not requiring it to be the farmer's regular vet.

Question: *If a farmer has a Review, do they need to do the specified types of disease testing to receive the funding?*

Answer: Yes, completing the specified disease testing is a condition of accessing the funding.

Question: *Is there going to be a Defra Animal Health & Welfare Pathway support team on the phone/online answer questions from private vets as the project progresses?*

Answer: For veterinary specific questions, no, there will not be. We haven't seen any need for that during the testing stage. We acknowledge that vets might need support to carry out a Review of animals not under their normal remit (a dairy vet reviewing a pig unit, for example), if this situation arises. We are working to produce some basic supporting materials to help vets in this situation.

For questions relating to the application process, yes there will be a support call line. Although, we don't expect that to be needed because we have designed it to be a simple process.

Question: *Is there a standardised report format that vets complete or is this an additional requirement that we develop as our own practice?*

Answer: The vet can complete the report in whichever format they are most comfortable with as this means less bureaucracy and as much time as possible spent on farm with the farmer.

Question: *How close do the farm visit part of the Review and the testing need to be? Do we have to schedule the Review to a time when it would be best to do the testing?*

Answer: The timing and sequencing of the different components of the Review are at the discretion of the farmer and the vet. The only strict requirement is the full Review is completed within six months of the application. We appreciate that different farming systems work to different schedules, which is why we are giving farmers and vets the freedom to decide what to schedule for when.

If, for any reason, the farmer is unable to complete their Review within the six-month period they won't incur any penalty. They can also withdraw at any point in the six-months and apply again at a time when the sequencing would work better.

Question: *Some farmers are time poor, so help from a vet to apply for the Review would be really valuable. Will this be possible?*

Answer: The application process has been designed to be as simple as possible, with the farmer only required to enter some basic details into an online form. If a vet is with the farmer when they are applying, they would be able to assist.

Question: *Who decides how to spend the funding available for the Review?*

Answer: The farmer, taking into account advice from their vet. Aside from a few basic requirements, including the mandatory testing for each species, Defra won't issue a 'checklist'. How money is spent once the basic requirements of the visit are met is a decision for farmers.

Question: *Are we required to use APHA Laboratories for the mandatory testing or are we able to use our preferred labs?*

Answer: Vets will be asked to send test samples to specified labs.

Question: *Can we do in house worm egg counts?*

Answer: During the co-design process, our industry partners highlighted that egg counts are variable in quality. SCOPS have worked to set out a standard both for collecting samples and carrying out testing. Labs that meet these requirements and other standards (such as relevant ISO or Vetqas through APHA) will be able to be used for testing.

Question: *In relation to sheep, are farmers restricted to testing for the efficacy of worming treatments at this stage or can they now elect to undertake testing for any of the iceberg disease instead?*

Answer: Farmers will be required to complete the prescribed testing for anthelmintic resistance as a condition of receiving funding for the Review. But over the life of the Pathway our intent is not for this to be the sole focus. When we launch our endemic

disease / conditions programmes we will move into addressing other issues, including iceberg diseases.

Question: *Will the report I have to write as part of the Review have a specific format?*

Answer: No, the vet is free to choose whatever format works best for them and the farmer. Aside from some specific, high-level information that the farmer will need to supply claim the funding that, the report can be as detailed as you choose.

Question: *Can a farmer delay the bulk testing of milk?*

Answer: They should be doing that at a time which makes sense for their business, within the 6-month period after the farmer has applied for the Review.

Question: *I've heard that the Review can be delivered by a team led by a vet? What would this entail?*

Answer: We believe vets are best placed to decide who has the relevant skills and experience to carry out the different components of a Review. So, while there is a requirement that a vet oversees the Review and signs off on the report, if the vet feels that using a vet tech to carry out the testing would be the best use of time and the funding, they are free to make that decision.

Question: *Regarding PRRS testing: will group Oral Fluids that are then tested for PCR qualify? These are non-invasive and would indicate PRRS status in a vaccinated animal?*

Answer: No. Blood sampling is required as it carries a lower risk of failure due to sample degradation.

Question: *would PRRS blood samples or splenic samples taken post-mortem qualify as they would help determine PRRS status in casualty animals*

Answer: Taking PRRS samples will need to be in accordance with best practice for taking appropriate samples from the right animals for PCR/ELISA tests.

Timeline.....

Question: *When can farmers start to apply?*

Answer: From January for farmers receiving BPS. The specific date will be shared as we get closer. At that point eligible farmers will be able to have one Review per SBI, but in time we will open that up so farmers who either keep more than one species, or have epidemiological distinct herds, can have multiple Reviews.

We will open the scheme up to non-BPS participants as soon as we can after January.

Question: *Is there a link I can direct farmers to so they can sign up for a Review?*

Answer: We'll be publishing this link on gov.uk in due course.

Question: *can farmers with dairy, beef and sheep apply for funding for multiple species/enterprises at the same time?*

Answer: when we first open to eligible keepers in January, it will only be one Review per SBI. However, as quickly as possible, we will iterate to allow vets to carry out multiple reviews if required where there are different species or multiple epidemiologically distinct herds/flocks.

Question: *When will you be sharing the full guidance for the Review?*

Answer: We appreciate that vets are keen to see the guidance as soon as possible and we will be sharing it once it has been fully tested.

Question: *How quickly will farmers who keep more than one species be able to apply for multiple Reviews?*

Answer: We fully appreciate how important this will be to many farmers, and our intent is to do this as quickly as possible.

Question: *What do farmers have to submit to get their payment?*

Answer: they will need to state the following: 1) that the Review and diagnostic testing has happened to the required standards 2) that they have received the report from the vet 3) which vet undertook the Review (and their RCVS number), and 4) share a unique reference number for the diagnostic testing which took place. They won't need to upload any documents, as we are trying to keep this as simple as possible.

Question: *Will the approved lab list for the annual Review testing be available soon?*

Answer: yes it will.

The rationale behind the Review.....

Question: *Many farmers are already actively testing for BVD/PRRS/Anthelmintic resistance. Is there a plan to offer other disease testing in the future?*

Answer: Through our [co-design](#) work with Industry, we received a strong steer that these were the right diseases / conditions to focus on at the start of the Pathway, because they offer the greatest opportunity to make a positive impact on overall health and welfare and the associated environmental, productivity and trade benefits. This will help us show how we are making progress and allow us to continue to build the Pathway. That will include

keeping the targeted diseases / conditions under review and expanding our focus when the time is right.

Question: *The difference in the amount of funding for a Review available for beef and dairy herds suggests that you think a significant amount of the funding should be spent on sampling for the required BVD funding. This doesn't seem to fit with your projected vision of the Review being flexible and of best value to the individual farm. Why have you included such a specific requirement?*

Answer: We want to focus on tackling endemic disease because of the range of positive productivity, trade and environmental impacts that come with this. This was a big ask from Industry. A part of that ask was our lack of understanding on disease prevalence, so the testing and sampling is a way to address this.

Question: *to clarify... a beef and sheep client can only apply for one species Review? Given that a huge proportion of farms are mixed, farmers will apply for beef as it's more money meaning you'll miss huge numbers of sheep Reviews and wormer check results*

Answer: we recognise that is a concern and are aiming to quickly open up the Review for multiple species under one SBI following launch in January.

Question: *How will the data collected be used to establish national disease prevalence?*

Answer: Over time we will start collecting the results from the testing done as part of the Review as a condition of the farmer receiving funding. This will be anonymised, and used to help us start to better understand disease prevalence.

Question: *Is the money for the annual Review expected to all be used on the Review or if money is left over what happens? Any guidance for how practices should structure charging?*

Answer: the payment goes to the farmer and the farmer needs to make sure a review happens, diagnostic testing is undertaken and a report is written and shared. The farmer will pay the vet based on the charge agreed with the vet. We expect there to be surplus money for the farmer and this should cover their time in the Review. Alternatively, the farmer could put this to further work with the vet, such as testing for other diseases using the samples.

Question: *regarding worming Reviews for sheep: nearly all of this will be most useful from June onwards so should we be advising sheep clients to delay signing up for the 6 months? Otherwise, vets will be getting poor results back and Defra will not be getting a clear picture of what is going on with wormer efficacy.*

Answer: we want farmers undertaking the Reviews and diagnostic testing at the optimum time. Therefore, we would expect delaying the Review in the vast majority of cases in the sheep sector.

Question: *Is testing for the priority diseases the only areas that will be funded? So if BVD testing is already in place, or the worm resistance status is already known on farm - is there be scope to add in testing for a different condition?*

Answer: Yes and no. The funding has to be used for the testing we have specified. However, if a farmer was already paying for BVD testing, they are now having that fee covered by government. This could free up those funds to test for something else.

Question: *What about farms that are already testing regularly for BVD, PRRS etc. - are they still eligible for grants?*

Answer: Yes, they will still be eligible for the grants, as well as the Review. We are encouraging farmers to arrange their Review's at the time of year when they would normally be doing their testing, so it can be funded as part of the Review. This is a good result for the farmer and vet as well as government as we collect data on the national flock.

Question: *What is there to stop a vet company forming specifically to deliver these Reviews, and then use them to claim that the animals on the farm are "under their care" and then prescribe meds for the herd or flock thereafter. Have the RCVS been consulted as to whether completing a Review means that the animals are under the care of the vet doing the Review?*

Answer: this judgement of whether animals are under the care of a vet, is a decision made by the vet. We are not looking at changing that.

Question: *Is tag and testing of all calves not recognised as sufficient for BVD testing?*

Answer: For the Review, it needs to be check testing. In the future, when we look at control and eradication, we believe tag and testing has a big part to play.

Question: *why are poultry units not able to have a Review?*

Answer: this was co-designed with industry. At that stage the poultry industry did not think the Review would be the right approach for them. It reflects that the poultry industry has other challengers compared with the large animal sectors. Although, this conversation with the industry has opened again.

Question: *Bulk milk testing for BVD is surely not a very sensitive measure? For the maximum impact shouldn't surveillance be same for beef and dairy?*

Answer: The intention is that the Pathway is a journey, and the Review is one part of that. Using this testing approach will offer us the chance to get a 'snap-shot' of BVD prevalence in the national herd. But we know testing alone won't deliver our goals for BVD. That is why we'll complement the testing in the Review with more in-depth action as part of the Pathway's BVD eradication programme.

Question: *Lots of vet practices have invested in in-house testing for anthelmintic resistance. The requirement to send tests to registered labs as part of Review will have an impact on these practices. How are you planning to address this?*

Answer: Our intent is not to put practices who have made this kind of investment in their business at a disadvantage. In-house labs who are meeting the SCOPS standards could also go through Vetqas and become able to carry out testing as part of the Review. This is likely to be both less expensive and less time consuming than seeking an appropriate ISO accreditation.

We also believe that the Review will create an opportunity for vets to visit farms who are not currently testing at all, so over time these farmers may see the benefits of testing and continue to do this with their vet in the long term.

Question: *Regarding pigs PRRS testing: presumably 30 pigs means blood sampling. Has this been cleared with the Home Office as diagnostic testing rather than as a scientific Procedure under ASPA?*

Answer: Blood sampling to assess herd status for a pathogen of pigs is a regular activity undertaken by veterinary surgeons under the Veterinary Surgeons Act. Sampling which is for the immediate or long term benefit of the individual animal, it's immediate cohort or the wider epidemiological group is covered as an act of clinical practice within the Veterinary Surgeon's Act 1966. As part of the Review, Vets and farmers should arrange PRRS testing at an appropriate time to inform disease status. For example, this may mean deciding to carry out a Review at a time of year when the herd would normally be tested for PRRS.

How Defra are promoting the scheme to farmers.....

Question: *How are you informing/promoting this to farmers?*

Answer: we are using multiple approaches, these can be summarised into digital engagement (such as blogs, tweets and YouTube videos) and event engagement (such as promoting at auction marts and ag shows). We also have what we call a 'Pathway Liaison Group' which consists of industry ambassadors for the pathway. We liaise with this group regularly to update them on the Pathway and help them to promote to their networks. Members include representatives from the National Sheep Association, BVA and the NFU. We also hope the farm vet will notify their farmers of this opportunity.

Routes to market.....

Question: *You talk about stimulating market demand and making it easier for consumers to purchase higher welfare products. Have you identified routes to market for these higher welfare products?*

Answer: It isn't necessarily about creating entirely new routes to market. The focus is about making it easier for consumers to make informed decisions about products. We are looking at ways to support the market, given that often the price producers receive does not often reflect the additional costs of the welfare action they undertake. For example, last year there was a call to evidence on welfare labelling which Defra undertook.

Devolved nations.....

Question: *Is the Review available for the devolved nations (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland)?*

Answer: the Pathway and Review are only available to English farmers. This is judged based on where the farm is located, rather than the veterinary practice.

Payment by results.....

Question: *How will the KPIs be chosen for the 'payment by results'?*

Answer: We are currently concluding a research project led by external animal welfare academics and economists which produced a cost-effectiveness analysis looking at which specific welfare improvements the payment by results scheme could support. The outcomes of this research, alongside our programme of co-design will inform the initial sectors supported and the ongoing development of the scheme which is billed to begin in late 2023 with full rollout in 2025.

Questions pertaining to the animal health and welfare capital grants

Question: *Does a farmer have to be signed up to the Pathway to access the Animal Health and Welfare Grants or are they available to all farmers?*

Answer: We intend for the grants to be open to all commercial farmers in England, regardless of their engagement with other parts of the Pathway. We believe that advice from a vet will be of real value to farmers when deciding which grant to apply for and are looking into how this will work in practice.

Question: *Are the Animal Health and Welfare grants only available to farmers that participate in the Animal Health and Welfare health planning?*

Answer: We intend for the grants to be available to all commercial livestock farmers in England, whether or not they have engaged with other parts of the Pathway, such as the Annual Health & Welfare Review.

Question: *Will farmers only be able to apply for equipment grants if it is mentioned in the Review?*

Answer: Farmers can apply for whatever they like, but we would like them to use the opportunity the Review presents to consult with their vets about what it is they should apply for.

Questions pertaining to the Slurry Infrastructure Grant

Question: *What is the minimum and maximum spend for the slurry storage grants?*

Answer: £25,000 to £250,000 – you can read full details about the grant on [GOV.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

Question: *Farmers have been telling me they'll have to pump water into covered slurry stores to enable them to pump the slurry. What are your thoughts on this?*

Answer: We recognise that there are trade-offs with the construction of certain designs of slurry stores and covers. Those invited for a full application will be offered a visit from a Catchment Sensitive Farming advisor who can advise on those trade-offs between the management of slurry, and water as well as issues such as the dry matter content of slurry.

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