

BVA submission to the Department for International Trade consultation on UK trade negotiations: Canada and Mexico

Introduction

- 1) The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom. With over 18,000 members, our primary aim is to represent, support and champion the interests of the United Kingdom's veterinary profession. We therefore take a keen interest in all issues affecting the profession, including animal health and welfare, public health, regulatory issues and employment matters.
- 2) We welcome the opportunity to provide evidence relating to the potential free trade agreements (FTAs) with Canada and Mexico. In both cases the UK has successfully replicated, as far as possible, the effect of pre-existing FTAs which are in place between the European Union and both countries.
- 3) Agreeing comprehensive FTAs with both Canada and Mexico that reduce barriers whilst maintaining standards of animal health, animal welfare and public health offers an opportunity for the export of UK products of animal origin (POAO).

Engagement with the veterinary profession

- 4) Veterinary surgeons deploy their expertise across domestic food production, from farm to fork, ensuring UK production meets the highest standards of animal health, animal welfare and food safety. They also play a unique role in international trade which is recognised around the world. The involvement of veterinary surgeons protects public health, food safety and animal health and welfare as well as providing assurance to trading partners.
- 5) FTAs contain provisions relating to animal health, animal welfare and public health: areas which fall within the expertise of the veterinary profession. Therefore, it has been disappointing that consultation with the veterinary profession on FTAs has been so limited. For example, no meeting was held with the profession prior to the publication of the recent Australian Trade Deal in principle. This is despite the BVA submitting an 8-page consultation response in 2018 highlighting serious concerns about animal welfare in Australian agriculture.
- 6) This poor engagement has highlighted the need for genuine veterinary input into future trade negotiations. As the UK continues to strike new trade deals with partners around the world, which will have consequences for animal health, animal welfare and public health, we would ask that the Department for International Trade, and Defra which leads on SPS aspects, reflect on how better to engage our uniquely relevant profession.
- 7) We note the existence of the Agri-food Trade Advisory Group. However, the membership of this group consists of business representative organisations and contains nobody from a veterinary, animal health, food safety or animal welfare science background. Therefore, engagement with this group can in no way be seen as meeting a requirement to have consulted on the wide range of concerns held by the veterinary profession.
- 8) BVA has welcomed the announcement by Government that it will place the Trade and Agriculture

Commission (TAC) on a statutory footing.¹ The Trade and Agricultural Commission (TAC) was established to advise the UK government on how best to advance the interests of British farmers, food producers, and consumers in future trade agreements.

- 9) It is essential that this strengthened body draws upon veterinary expertise to scrutinise future trade deals and put animal health and welfare at the centre of decision making. Veterinary perspectives were included on the original TAC. Former UK CVO Nigel Gibbens sat on the TAC, and former BVA President Simon Doherty joined the Commission's standards sub-group.

Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures

- 10) Imports of both animals and animal products may carry pathogens that can represent a threat to UK public health and the health of animal populations. Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures are those measures to protect humans, animals, and plants from diseases, pests, or contaminants. SPS measures form a vital part of the UK's biosecurity framework and should not be seen solely as a barrier to trade that needs to be overcome. In the broadest sense, biosecurity can be said to cover every aspect of disease control, prevention and treatment, all of which are areas that rely upon the knowledge and skill of veterinary professionals.
- 11) Maintaining biosecurity whilst increasing trade with Canada and Mexico will be important as both pose disease risks. The severe pig disease porcine epidemic diarrhea (PED) is present in both Mexico and Canada and Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a concern in Canada. Any plans to remove quarantine and allow free access to pet animals would raise concerns about diseases which are endemic in other countries.
- 12) The great majority of new free trade agreements (FTAs) now contain provisions seeking to reduce friction caused by SPS trade requirements. SPS issues have often taken centre stage in the most recent and wide-ranging trade agreements.
- 13) The roll-over deals the UK has secured with both Canada and Mexico largely replicate the SPS chapters that existed previously with the EU: EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the EU-Mexico EPPCCA.
- 14) CETA was signed in 2016 and is a modern example of an SPS chapter. In fact, it is perhaps the EU's most extensive to date. CETA establishes specific rules for equivalence, streamlines approval processes, and facilitates cooperation through its Joint Management Committee for SPS measures. It would be useful to understand how the Government would seek to expand upon these provisions.
- 15) On the other hand, EPPCCA was signed in 1997 and entered into force in 2000, meaning there is more scope to progress from the current baseline to agree a more ambitious deal in line with CETA. The EU and Mexico recognised this fact and reached an agreement in principle for a new FTA in April 2018.²
- 16) A new deal with Mexico should create a forum where opportunities to simplify SPS requirements or remove barriers can be agreed. This work is often technical and requires professional knowledge, hence the importance of veterinary surgeons within the trade sphere. The inclusion of veterinary surgeons as part of trade negotiation teams, trade missions, and within embassies

¹ <https://www.bva.co.uk/news-and-blog/news-article/bva-welcomes-important-step-for-animal-health-and-welfare-as-government-puts-trade-and-agriculture-commission-on-legal-footing/>

² <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=1830>

is the norm for many of our trading partners, and as such the UK should bolster its trade personnel with veterinary surgeons who are able to provide an unparalleled level of assurance to trading partners.

- 17) To support cooperation on SPS barriers under a new FTA, the UK Government should develop a process whereby vets, farmers and processors are engaged to identify unnecessary SPS barriers. This could form a key component of the UK's ongoing cooperation with Canada and Mexico on SPS barriers.
- 18) Within any FTA the UK should not permit imports that fail to meet the current high human and public health standards onto the UK market. Within the UK these goods would become indistinguishable from UK produce, jeopardising the ability of exporters to trade using the good reputation of the UK as a high animal health and welfare producer. This would increase the risk posed by goods leaving Great Britain failing to meet EU SPS standards. Consequently, the need for risk-based checks on Great Britain goods entering the EU Single Market, including Northern Ireland, would rise. This would place additional delays on producers.
- 19) The UK Government should seek to apply a single standard to the production of animal products destined either for UK consumers or foreign markets. A single standard that includes veterinary controls and certifications will avoid the confusion and the opportunity for fraud that is associated with multiple parallel standards, avoid compromised animal health and welfare, and ensure consumer confidence at home and abroad.

Tariff reduction and standards

- 20) Veterinary surgeons, as qualified professionals who play an essential role in the operation of international trade, want to see a high standard of animal health, welfare and food hygiene prioritised within any trade negotiations and deals including with Canada and Mexico.
- 21) The TAC published its report in March 2020. Key amongst their recommendations was recommendation 8 which stated that:³

“The UK government should take an ambitious approach to the liberalisation of the UK's import tariff regime, for countries that can meet the high standards of food production expected from UK producers. It should work with trading partners within future FTA negotiations to lower tariffs and quotas to zero where equivalence is demonstrated for these standards.”

- 22) The report submits that the UK should adopt a three-pillar approach to liberalizing international trade. The most pertinent for the purposes of an FTA is pillar two, which establishes how “core standards” should be developed:

“Zero tariff, zero quota access to UK markets in FTAs would be matched to a core set of standards and technical norms in a number of areas. If trading partners could not demonstrate equivalence with core standards, then they would not be considered for zero tariff, zero quota access for those products to which the core standards applied. These standards and technical norms would:

- *reflect the shared ambitions of the UK and its trading partners;*

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/969045/Trade-and-Agriculture-Commission-final-report.pdf

- be derived from international standards and norms; and
- already be applied in the UK.

The UK government should negotiate on the basis of this core set of standards, including climate change, environmental, ethical and animal welfare measures. When determining these priority standards, the UK government should take account of domestic production standards and the extent to which they reflect international standards' agreements. Implementation of this pillar would require further analysis and consultation, particularly with the Devolved Administrations. Determining which standards and norms should be considered as part of this pillar would need to involve consultation with all stakeholders. Agreement of a broad and comprehensive core set of standards would maximise the trade liberalisation that this approach could deliver.”⁴

- 23)** The UK government has yet to respond to the recommendations of the Commission. In fact, it has instead rushed ahead to agree a deal with Australia that would allow preferential imports into the UK that would not meet the animal welfare standards expected of UK producers.⁵
- 24)** As a matter of urgency, before initiating further FTA negotiations, the UK Government should adopt the recommendations of the TAC. The development of core standards that would need to be met before the UK would offer tariff free access to its market should begin in earnest. It will be vital to have engagement with the veterinary profession of these standards.
- 25)** A key issue that should be covered within those core standards would be the use of sow stalls in the pig industry. They were completely banned in the UK in 1999. This would be relevant for Canada and Mexico, where sow stalls are still utilised. However, we are aware that Canada is moving to group housing from 2024.
- 26)** Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) should also be a significant factor in UK core standards. This standard should consider both regulation (e.g., prescribing requirements) and actual outcomes in terms of antimicrobial use or sales data. We welcome that Canada has recently ended the use of medically important antibiotics for growth promotion, and from December 2018 farmers need to obtain a veterinary prescription for using medically important antibiotics. However, at 150 mg/kg,⁶ Canadian farm antibiotic use is nearly 5 times higher than UK use (31 mg/kg)⁷ per livestock unit.

Animal welfare and AMR chapters

- 27)** We have called on Government to include ambitious and comprehensive animal welfare chapters, including detailed provisions on animal welfare cooperation, within all new FTAs. Similarly ambitious provisions for collaboration on antimicrobial resistance should also be a priority.
- 28)** The membership of forums established under FTAs to enable this collaboration will be important. We would ask the UK government to consider the balance of expertise it proposes for any such

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/969045/Trade-and-Agriculture-Commission-final-report.pdf

⁵ BVA response to Department for International Trade consultation on trade negotiations with Australia, October 2018

⁶ <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/documents/services/drugs-health-products/canadian-antimicrobial-resistance-surveillance-system-2020-report/CARSS-2020-report-2020-eng.pdf>

⁷ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/950126/UK-VARSS_2019_Report__2020-TPaccessible.pdf

groups. Defra, as the UK Government department with responsibility for animal welfare should lead on this process. The involvement of veterinary surgeons will be essential.

Geographical Indications

- 29)** High animal welfare standards and high environmental standards reinforce the marketability of our produce. Within its trade policy, the UK Government should look to maximise opportunities to promote high-quality, high-welfare UK produce to export markets, including those products which might benefit from labelling that demonstrates region of origin (e.g. Scottish salmon, Welsh lamb and Yorkshire Wensleydale cheese). This can help secure opportunities for UK farmers and open up new export opportunities.
- 30)** It is therefore welcome to see that FTAs includes a provision allowing more British products to receive protected recognition in these markets.

Veterinary capacity to meet certification demand

- 31)** The UK will require a veterinary workforce with the capability and capacity necessary to facilitate international trade both with the EU and other trade partners. To continue to trade, the UK must have enough appropriately trained Official Veterinarians (OV) to meet the additional demands for export and import certification. If that requirement is not fulfilled, it could present a significant barrier to trade and limit any opportunities for the farming and food sectors that may be found in a new FTA.
- 32)** From January 2021, exporters have required an export health certificate (EHC) signed by an OV to transport animals, products of animal origin or germplasm from Great Britain to the EU Single Market. The OV signature attests that relevant public health and animal health requirements have been met.
- 33)** To date, we are not aware of any consignment failing to leave Great Britain for lack of an available OV. However, we are aware that capacity is stretched. The number of vets in GB who have become qualified as OVs to sign EHCs for animal products has tripled from 600 in February 2019, to over 1,800. This has created a huge workload for the profession. Estimates provided by the SPS Certification Working Group,⁸ suggest that for the first five months of 2021, 116.1 years of certifier time have been required just to export products of animal origin and livestock to the EU (not including Northern Ireland).

⁸ The Working Group is made up of food and feed trade associations, hauliers, farmers and veterinary and environmental health professional organisations, working together to minimise trade friction in Export Health Certificate (EHC)/SPS products between GB and the EU/NI by identifying issues and proposing solutions to Government and its Agencies.

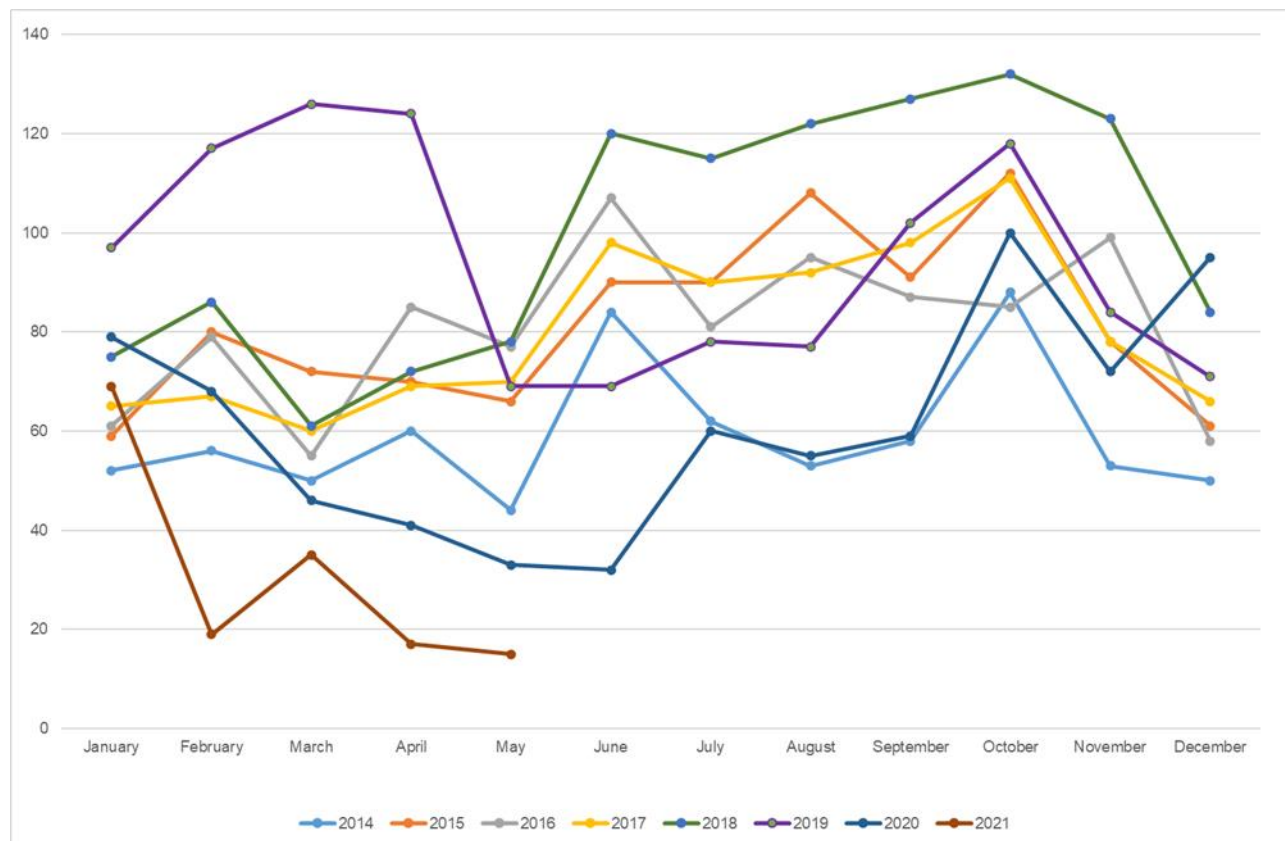
EU EHCs issued 2020 vs 2021 by month - excluding equines, germplasm, pets

Month	Year		% change	<u>Certifier Burden Running total 2021</u>	
	2020	2021		certifier hours (@2h/cert)	243356
January	279	36233	12987%	certifier days (8h)	30419.5
February	164	22997	14023%	certifier years (262d)	116.1
March	272	25706	9451%		
April	73	19128	26203%		
May	89	17614	19791%		
Cumulative total	877	121678	13874%		

- 34) Many of the expected veterinary demands have yet to materialise. As a result, we still do not know if the UK has sufficient vet capacity to meet further demands. As the provisions of the Scheme for Temporary Agri-food Movements to Northern Ireland (STAMNI) begin to be phased out from October 2021, EHCs will also be required for goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. The latest Defra estimate is that demand for EHCs may increase 70,000-150,000 per year as a result. This is estimated to require Up to 70 full time equivalent OVs.
- 35) Previous Defra estimates, based on a survey conducted prior to the end of the transition period, found that the average time an OV spent on certification was approximately 15%. Defra expected this percentage to increase with the greatly increased demand and increasing specialisation and used a range of 10% to 30% within their preparatory work. Using this same range, 70 FTE OVs could require between 233 or 700 actual vets.
- 36) There will also be the need for OVs to perform import checks once sanitary controls are phased in for imports into GB from the EU. Defra funded £14 million in England to support recruitment and training of over 500 new staff, including OVs.⁹
- 37) Where the required veterinary capacity to fulfil these roles will be found is unknown. The UK is highly reliant on EU vets. According to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), on 19 January 2021, there were 27,324 UK practising vets. Of these, 7,936 graduated in the EU (29% of the total). In recent years, more veterinary surgeons who registered in the UK qualified in the EU than in the UK. In 2019, RCVS data on where new registrants graduated showed the following:
- 48%- EU/ EEA
 - 42%- UK
 - 10%- 3rd countries
- 38) Free movement of people has had an enormous impact on our veterinary workforce. The end of free movement creates additional barriers to the movement of EU-qualified vets to the UK.
- 39) According to figures provided by the RCVS, between January and May 2021, 155 EU vets

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-for-new-checks-on-animal-products-creates-500-jobs>

registered in the UK. By the same point in 2020 this figure was 267. Free movement was in operation during 2020, however, this figure was likely suppressed due to Covid-19 related restrictions. Therefore 2019, offers the most useful baseline as is the last year under free movement without the downward pressure of Covid-19 on immigration. In that year, by the same point, 533 EU graduates had registered in the UK. Therefore, less than 30% of the pre-covid, pre-end of transition number has registered so far this year.



- 40) We know that government is concerned about vet capacity, and what this increase in EHC OV demand will mean for the other vital roles undertaken by vets. In particular the operation of official controls in abattoirs.
- 41) The Food Standards Agency and DEFRA have put in place contingency procedures for abattoir OVs. They have asked the RCVS to admit to its temporary register, vets who are unable to meet the requisite level 7 International English Language Testing System (IELTS) qualifications. To make use of this mitigation, vets will require:
- have a contract of employment to work as an OV providing meat hygiene controls;
 - have the necessary skilled worker visa including IELTS at level 5; and
 - hold European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) accredited veterinary degrees and
 - have completed and passed the meat OV training course.
- 42) This temporary registration will last for 12 months, with the possibility of an extension of six months, during which time the temporary registrant will be expected to pass the IELTS level 7 test. Whilst on the temporary register, the individual's role will be limited in scope and under the supervision of an MRCVS.
- 43) This FSA contingency for abattoir OVs has now been utilised. A similar provision has been put in place to allow EHC OVs to register in the same way but has yet to be triggered by the Defra

Secretary of State.

- 44) BVA recognises the need for this contingency and has support its use with the caveat that it should not lead to a two-tier system and that longer-term there must be innovative solutions found to develop the current model and improve reward and recognition.