BVA RESPONSE TO DEFRA CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS TO INTRODUCE LANGUAGE CONTROLS FOR MIGRANT EU VETERINARY SURGEONS

1) The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom and has over 15,000 members. Our primary aim is to represent, support and champion the interests of the veterinary profession in this country, and 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 were pleased to have been given the opportunity to respond to the consultation regarding proposals to introduce language controls for migrant EU veterinary surgeons. We understand that the Professional Qualifications Directive was amended and came into force in January 2014, making it clear that competent authorities for each profession in each Member State have the right to ensure professionals have sufficient linguistic knowledge to practise that profession. This means that RCVS have the right to ensure that any EU vet seeking to work in the UK has the necessary knowledge of English as a condition of registration. As veterinary surgeons have a duty of care for the health and welfare of animals and play a crucial role in public health we are fully supportive of the principle that a certain standard of proficiency in English is an essential quality for a vet practising in the UK. We therefore support the proposal that the Registrar of RCVS is provided with the explicit right to require that any new applicant to the register demonstrates competence in English language.

RCVS powers to assess English language ability

3) As the role of RCVS is to set, uphold, and advance veterinary standards, we agree that it must maintain the public’s confidence, in both the profession and in itself as regulator. We support the proposal to give explicit powers to ensure that all prospective registrants to the UK register have the necessary knowledge of English to carry out their work competently, and we believe this would meet public expectation.

Evidence of language ability

4) We support the proposal that during the registration process applicants will be asked to self-certify and that the ability of an applicant to answer the questions asked at this stage will in itself be considered a demonstration of English language capability. The fact that applicants will also be able to submit other evidence of ability such as having studied in English, worked for an English-speaking organisation, or having lived in a multi-lingual household (including English) ensures that applicants can call upon a broad spectrum of examples to help support their claims.

Refusal of registration

5) We support the proposal that, in the event of an applicant not being able to satisfactorily demonstrate competence in English, RCVS will give the applicant the opportunity to improve their competence before reapplying, only resorting to formal
language controls if concerns arise during the various stages of the registration process. We agree that this proposed approach is proportionate and risk-based and will meet the objective of preventing harm to animal health and welfare and public health while not introducing artificial barriers preventing migrant vets from working in the UK.

Addressing current disparity in language competence of European veterinary surgeons, UK, and overseas applicants

6) As the RCVS already check the language competence of veterinary surgeons whose qualification is not recognised, by making proof of English language competence a pre-requisite to application for the RCVS Statutory Membership Examination, we are satisfied that these proposals are merely closing the current gap and ensuring consistency.