BVA RESPONSE TO MIGRATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE CALL FOR EVIDENCE IN RELATION TO MINIMUM SALARY THRESHOLDS FOR TIER 2

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 Migration Advisory Committee consultation call for evidence in relation to minimum salary thresholds for Tier 2 for veterinarians.

Potential impact of increasing Tier 2 minimum thresholds on the veterinary employment market

3) Whilst BVA is not an employer of vets, many members of the Association are. The factors underpinning the influx of non-EU migrant veterinary surgeons to the UK are complex and there is danger of over simplification of the issues by attempting to address it via salary thresholds alone.

All veterinary surgeons working in the UK must be registered with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). Non-EU migrant veterinary surgeons with qualifications recognised by RCVS Council, and which meet the minimum EU training requirements may be eligible to register with the RCVS under the Commonwealth registration provisions. Graduates of other veterinary schools and colleges (outside the EU) are normally required to sit and pass the RCVS Statutory Examination for Membership. This justifiably rigorous registration process provides the public and the UK employers of veterinary surgeons with reassurance that non-EU migrant veterinary surgeons working in the UK are suitably qualified to do so.

We are aware of reports from veterinary employers in the UK that there are difficulties in recruiting suitably experienced veterinary surgeons across the disciplines and therefore employers are looking to the EU and beyond to fill those vacancies. This of course creates its own obstacles, with the recent BVA Voice of the Veterinary Profession survey showing that 12% of respondents had found fluency in English to be a barrier to recruitment in the past year. However, until such time as the root causes of the shortage of suitably experienced native veterinary surgeons are identified and resolved we would not wish to see excessive barriers to entry of well qualified non-EU migrants put in place. We don’t believe that increasing the Tier 2 minimum thresholds will reduce the requirement for non-EU migrant veterinary surgeons in the UK.

Raising Tier 2 thresholds could cause wage inflation in the UK as increased salaries for non-EU migrants must also be matched for natives. This could force the cost of doing business upwards, reducing the profits of many already-marginal practices and causing costs to be passed on to clients, with a potential knock-on impact on
animal welfare.

Sources of salary data
4) The Society of Practicing Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS) Salary Survey is published annually and provides a useful source of data. In establishing minimum salary thresholds it must be appreciated that the SPVS survey figures will include ancillary benefits e.g. CPD allowances and membership subscriptions in a total employment package.

Variations in regional pay
5) Across the UK there are geographical variations in pay and also variations linked to different types of veterinary work. Minimum thresholds should not disadvantage certain veterinary businesses on the basis of location or area of work and should therefore reflect regional variations.

Conclusion
6) Non EU migrants are a valuable source of veterinary expertise in the UK employment market where many businesses are experiencing difficulty recruiting experienced veterinary surgeons. Whilst minimum salary thresholds should be set to support fair employment practices they should not unduly disadvantage non EU graduates who can provide valuable skills and expertise with verifiable levels of training and qualification.