

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs,
Nobel House,
17 Smith Square,
London SW1P 3JR

Via email

Monday 27 April 2015

Dear Secretary of State,

New TB testing contracts

You will recall that when you met with the British Veterinary Association (BVA) last December one of the issues which was raised was the Veterinary Delivery Partnership, APHA's tendering project for Official Veterinary (OV) services.

Since plans to tender for OV services were first announced in 2010, BVA and BCVA have been concerned that there may be unintended consequences and undertook to monitor the situation closely. On 16 February APHA announced the Delivery Partners for England and draft contracts were sent to potential subcontractors (private veterinary practices) from mid-April to be reviewed and signed by 24 April with a start date of 1 May. Subsequent revisions have been received as late as 22 April.

BVA and BCVA members across the country, including in the high incidence TB areas in the south west of England, have raised a number of questions and concerns about the contracts, particularly about the short timeframe which has been imposed. Individual veterinary practices have effectively been given a few days to consider and sign contracts, which seems particularly unreasonable and is not in line with normal procedure for commercial contracts. It is of the utmost importance in any contractual arrangements that signatories are given sufficient time to enable them to undertake proper consideration.

We understand that some veterinary practices have been able to secure short extensions informally via the Delivery Partners, but BVA and BCVA believe that more time is needed for veterinary practices to consider the contracts. These are important decisions that could have a significant impact on the viability of their businesses, which are on the front-line of disease surveillance and control.

Consequently, we are asking you to grant an extension to the deadline for signing new TB testing contracts to the end of May with a start date of 1 June in order to give veterinary practices enough time to consider the contracts properly, taking legal advice if necessary, and to discuss any questions or concerns with the Delivery Partners. Should a one-month extension not be granted

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then there is a significant risk that veterinary businesses will not feel able to sign the contract. This contradicts this government's commitment to SMEs, risks loss of business by these SMEs and puts at serious risk any smooth transition to the new working arrangements.

It is essential that the government works with the Delivery Partners and private veterinary practices to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements in order to ensure the TB eradication programme can be delivered effectively.

Yours sincerely,



John Blackwell
BVA President



Neil Blake
BCVA Junior Vice President

CC: Mr Chris Hadkiss
Chief Executive APHA