

Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency merger

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS HAPPENING?

1. What is happening, and when?

- In June 2010 Defra announced the merger of Animal Health and the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, effective from 1 April 2011.
- In addition approximately 50 mostly veterinary and scientific advisory staff will transfer from core-Defra to the new agency. With this transfer the agency will take full responsibility for advising the Food and Farming Group (FFG) within Defra on the veterinary and scientific evidence base for policy development.

2. What is the rationale for the change?

- The merger will bring together services, expertise and scientific capability on animal health and welfare into one agency. All constituent parts work to combat animal diseases and bringing these together will create a strong new organisation. It will improve resilience in delivering important services, including an emergency response capability for animal disease and providing high impact science to inform policy making, in a tough financial climate.
- Including the veterinary and scientific advisors within the new agency will ensure that both delivery and scientific inputs are brought most effectively into the evidence for policy making and will help make best use of these professional resources.

3. Is this simply a cost saving measure?

- No, the main rationale is to improve the resilience of the combined agency to continue to deliver an effective and professional service in light of the government's Spending Review.
- Modest savings will be made from duplicated functions, estates and creating more efficient ways of working.

4. How much will the merger cost?

- This is a reorganisation within Defra and it is not expected that there will be significant additional costs as a direct result of the merger. All work to re-brand the agency is being kept to a minimum, in line with the Government's marketing and advertising freeze, and is using in-house resources.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE NEW AGENCY?

5. What is the new agency's name and status?

Corporate Office: AHVLA, Block C, Government Buildings, Whittington Road, Worcester WR5 2LQ

t +44(0)1905 763355 f +44(0)1905 768851 e corporate.centre@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk

The Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency is an executive agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, working across Great Britain on behalf of Defra, Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly Government

www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla

- Ministers' have agreed that the agency's name will be Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency (AHVLA). It is an executive agency and will work on behalf of Defra, the Welsh Assembly Government, the Scottish Government and other customers.

6. What will the new organisation will do?

- AHVLA will help safeguard animal health and welfare and public health, protect the economy and enhance food security through research, surveillance and inspection.
- It will do so by providing laboratory and field services for a wide range of customers, both in government and in farming and other industries, including facilitating trade in animals and animal products. The integrated business covers a wide range of roles, from field activity on-farm and at markets through to specialist laboratory and scientific services across Great Britain. This includes – amongst a great many others – functions such as research and consultancy, surveillance and the management of disease controls (e.g. TB testing, import and export controls, and the Pet Travel Scheme), and protecting the nation's food supply through egg marketing and dairy hygiene inspections. There are several other UK functions – notably acting as the reference laboratory for certain exotic and zoonotic diseases, and working to protect endangered wildlife by regulating the trade in CITES protected species.
- As well as delivering this wide range of functions between incursions of exotic disease, AHVLA will maintain the key capability to respond to animal disease emergencies, both in the field in Great Britain and also, through its reference laboratory function, supporting the management of disease in Northern Ireland, the EU and world-wide.

7. How many people will the merged agency employ?

- As at April 2011, AHVLA employs approximately 3,000 staff.

8. Will the agency have a policy making role?

- No. Rather it will have a key role in supporting policy making through the provision of expert veterinary and scientific advice and delivery experience to enable effective implementation.

9. What will change?

- The agency is being launched in a challenging environment which will require a flexible and innovative response. The merger provides an opportunity to challenge how services are delivered and to look at new ways of working, including looking again at what work needs to be delivered in-house and what can be delivered with or through others.

10. What are the benefits for our customers and will stakeholders notice any difference in service delivery?

- The merged agency will bring the majority of animal health and veterinary expertise within one organisation. Doing so will add to the resilience of the new agency when preparing for and responding to animal disease emergencies.

- The agency will continue to have at its core a commitment to excellence and efficient service. Business as usual activities will not be adversely impacted as a result of the merger. Indeed, it offers the opportunity to find better ways of doing that work.
- The agency seeks to continue to be viewed by customers as a source of excellence in science, as the authoritative provider of guidance to help livestock keepers and others comply with relevant regulations and as an effective regulator.

11. How does the merger sit with the Responsibility and Cost Sharing Report recently produced by Rosemary Radcliffe’s Advisory Group?

- The new agency will deliver services across Great Britain whereas the Responsibility and Cost Sharing Report only covers England. The new agency will ensure that it continues to work closely and effectively with Defra and any new groups or bodies which result from that report.

12. How does the agency’s role differ in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

- AHVLA operates across Great Britain on behalf of Defra, Scottish Government, the Welsh Assembly Government, and the Food Standards Agency, and provides services to other Government Departments, official international bodies and commercial customers.
- Some functions are provided for the whole of the UK, notably the UK reference laboratory function and wildlife licensing and registration, whilst others, for example egg market and dairy hygiene inspections and some aspects of scanning surveillance, are only undertaken in England and Wales.
- AHVLA provides veterinary and delivery advice to support policy making across GB and has taken responsibility for the whole of the function, supplying veterinary and scientific advice to policy making, in England in particular.

13. What will the announcement of the devolution of animal health and welfare budgets mean for the agency?

- AHVLA will continue to deliver services across Great Britain (and in some cases across the United Kingdom) on behalf of all the policy administrations.
- By working across administrative boundaries, the agency is in the position to deliver significant benefits to its policy customers in terms of resilience, economy of scale benefits and supports a more cohesive and joined up response to disease events and incidents.

WHERE WILL THE AGENCY BE LOCATED?

14. Where will AHVLA be headquartered?

- Weybridge and Worcester will remain as HQ sites.

15. What will be the impact on the regional network of both agencies?

Corporate Office: AHVLA, Block C, Government Buildings, Whittington Road, Worcester WR5 2LQ

t +44(0)1905 763355 f +44(0)1905 768851 e corporate.centre@ahvla.gsi.gov.uk

The Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency is an executive agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, working across Great Britain on behalf of Defra, Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly Government

www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla

- VLA and Animal Health already share some sites. It is possible that the merger will highlight additional opportunities to rationalise the estate and it will be necessary to make use of these, but no decisions have yet been made.

HOW WILL THE AGENCY BE MANAGED?

16. Who will be the chief executive?

- Catherine Brown, previously chief executive of Animal Health, has been appointed as AHVLA's first chief executive. Previously Catherine had a career in the private sector in Unilever and BUPA, and in the NHS.

17. How was the chief executive appointed?

- The job was advertised publicly and over 100 applications were received. A shortlist was drawn up and interviews took place on 14 December 2010. The Board was chaired by a Civil Service Commissioner and included senior managers from Defra and two independent members (from the Scottish Government and National Pig Association).

18. Is this really a merger or a take-over?

- This is a merger – a new agency is being created to deliver efficient and effective services in the field and in the commissioning and creation of high impact science. Both agencies have unique functions and skills and both will contribute to making AHVLA more than the sum of its parts. Both Animal Health and VLA management teams were involved in, and supportive of, the decision to merge and teams of front line staff around the country from every part of the new agency have been welcoming the merger and the opportunity to work more closely together.