

# New alternative dispute resolution trial launched as Veterinary Client Mediation Service (VCMS)

30 September 2016

**On Monday 3 October 2016 a new alternative dispute resolution (ADR) trial, known as the Veterinary Client Mediation Service (VCMS) will be launched on a nine-month basis.**

We are funding the trial which will be administered by [Nockolds Solicitors \[http://www.nockolds.co.uk/\]](http://www.nockolds.co.uk/), a legal firm which has experience in running consumer dispute and mediation services. This is the second time we have trialled an ADR service – the first trial, administered by Ombudsman Services, was launched in November 2014 and came to a close this summer.

The VCMS is free and voluntary for both parties and will be able to consider those concerns that do not meet our threshold of serious professional misconduct.

Eleanor Ferguson, Registrar for the RCVS, explains: “Annually, the RCVS receives around 1,000 concerns from members of the public about veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses. However, around 80 percent of cases are closed at the assessment and investigation stage and while, for example, the RCVS may be able to give advice to the practitioner about professional conduct, we are not in a position to recommend the sort of practical solutions that may resolve matters. We understand that this can be very frustrating for both animal owners and practices who may feel that the issues are therefore unresolved.

“As with the last trial we are hoping we can find a way of resolving concerns that members of the public may have about veterinary services in an appropriate way.

“However, a key difference with the VCMS from the previous trial is that it can be accessed directly rather than having to go through the [RCVS concerns investigation process](#)

<http://www.rcvs.org.uk/concerns/> first. We hope that this will appeal to both parties as it will offer a quicker and simpler way of resolving client concerns without RCVS involvement and should improve satisfaction with the process from both parties.”

We are delighted to be launching the service and look forward to offering the benefits of mediation to both animal owners, veterinary professionals and their practices. In our experience mediation enables the parties to find a resolution which both can accept, and allows them to move on.” Jennie Jones, VCMS

Nockolds Solicitors already runs a similar scheme on behalf of the General Optical Council (GOC) known as the Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS) and will bring to bear many years’ experience of resolving complaints through mediation.

Jennie Jones heads the VCMS and said: “We are delighted to be launching the service and look forward to offering the benefits of mediation to both animal owners, veterinary professionals and their practices. In our experience mediation enables the parties to find a resolution which both can accept, and allows them to move on.

“Complaints can be highly emotive, and this is a particular feature of veterinary complaints given the close relationship between owner and animal. Mediation acknowledges the emotional elements of a complaint whilst being future-focused. Mediation is by its nature voluntary, meaning the parties feel empowered and make a positive decision to resolve the concerns.

“As a free at the point of use scheme accessed directly by the public, we look forward to receiving calls and enquiries from animal owners as well as answering questions about the VCMS and mediation from veterinary professionals and practice managers. We are happy to help practices to explore the benefits of mediation and an ADR scheme for veterinary complaints as well as understand how the VCMS can assist with a particular complaint situation within their practice.”

The trial will run until July 2017 and will deal specifically with concerns made about the treatment of horses, cats, dogs and other small mammals (eg rabbits, hamsters, gerbils etc) by a veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse.

The [VCMS website](http://www.vetmediation.co.uk) <http://www.vetmediation.co.uk> has further information about the trial including frequently asked questions for both veterinary clients and professionals. The VCMS will be available between 8am and 6pm, Monday to Friday, from Monday 3 October and will be contactable on 0845 040 5834 or [enquiries@vetmediation.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@vetmediation.co.uk)

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