



VLA Strategic and Corporate Plan 2009/10 - 2013/14

An Executive Agency of the
Department for
Environment, Food and
Rural Affairs

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE INTRODUCTORY COMMENT

The foundation for this strategic and corporate plan is a refreshed Mission Statement and a new Vision; both of which will drive us forward over the next five years to maintain the VLA as the leading national and a key international source of veterinary expertise.

This plan is the culmination of a year long in depth analysis of VLA's business and the environment in which it operates. It takes account of the views of our many stakeholder groups and importantly supports UK food and farming policy and strategy.

Clear measurable objectives are a key feature of the plan, and are focussed on the delivery of benefits to our customers and wider stakeholders. The aim is that our science and experience will advise and inform national and international evidence-based policy making.

Our objectives are focussed around three key drivers:

- Profile, Influence and Customer Responsiveness
- Excellent Scientific Knowledge and Services
- Sustainability, Efficiency and Flexibility

Over the course of the next five years, these key drivers will underpin all of VLA's work. This will enable us to develop a flexible and agile organisation that can quickly respond to the many changes and challenges that we face in the years ahead; and to help support a vibrant and viable food and farming sector.

Professor Peter Borriello
VLA Chief Executive

1. THE VLA – WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

1.1 ABOUT VLA

The Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) is an Executive Agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and is well recognised as a centre of scientific excellence. For over 100 years, we have been delivering research, surveillance and laboratory services for animal and public health.

We operate from 16 main sites across the UK, which includes a headquarters near Weybridge in Surrey including five farms; a laboratory facility at Pentlands Park in Scotland; two regional laboratories in Wales and a regional network of 12 laboratories across England. We also have two surveillance centres operated via sub contracts with the Liverpool and the London veterinary colleges.

The primary aim of the VLA is to help deliver the Government's requirements for animal and public health and sustainable agriculture and food industries by delivering excellent and value for money knowledge, evidence and services. In doing this we support Defra's overall purpose, their public service agreement and departmental strategic objectives; as well as the overall aims and objectives of the Food Standards Agency (Annex A).

Our Mission is:

To safeguard public and animal health, protect the economy and enhance food security through world-class veterinary research and surveillance.

Looking ahead through the life of this plan:

Our vision is to be recognised as the leading national source and a key international source of quality evidence-based scientific and technical advice, services, support and leadership on surveillance, epidemiology and laboratory sciences for animal health and zoonoses. We want to make a difference and to be recognised by all as an organisation that provides benefit at the local, regional, national and international level.

Delivery of our Mission and Vision 'being the best and being seen as the best' will adhere to core principles and values that underpin our behaviour. These are:

- Show leadership to promote shared vision and values.
- Demonstrate rigour and responsibility in relation to our science.
- Be open to constructive criticism and external challenge.
- Comply with all legal requirements and work to the highest ethical standards.
- Promote our corporate and social responsibility across the Agency.
- Strive for excellence and confront poor performance.
- Share knowledge and communicate openly at all levels.
- Treat everyone fairly and recognise their views and contributions.
- Treat everyone with dignity and respect and be intolerant of discrimination.
- Work together to turn problems into solutions.

1.2 OUR SERVICES

In broad terms we deliver veterinary research, surveillance, consultancy, laboratory and epidemiology services as well as an emergency response capability mainly to the UK, the EU and the private sector. We do this by working with other Government delivery partners as well as via collaborations with veterinary and scientific organisations in the UK and overseas.

Our services comprise a wide range of interrelated core functions and capabilities grouped under the headings:

- Disease prevention and control.
- Epidemiology and surveillance.
- Emergency preparedness and response.
- Environmental and public health protection.
- Reference and specialised testing.
- Supporting regulation and policy development and quality improvement.
- Supporting international trade.
- Animal health related research.
- Expert advice and consultancy.
- Enabling partnership and communication.
- Training and education.

Further information on each is included in Table 1.

Disease Prevention and Control	Environmental & Public Health Protection	Reference and Specialised Testing	Supporting Regulation and Policy Development and Quality Improvement	Animal Health Related Research	Enabling Partnerships and Communication
<p>To provide reference microbiology & surveillance for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bacteria - Viruses - Fungi - Parasites - Prions <p>International reference services support</p> <p>Support disease outbreak investigation</p> <p>Detect & monitor emerging & imported infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistances</p> <p>Search for new pathogens</p> <p>Vector-borne diseases</p> <p>Zoonoses</p> <p>General & on-call support and expert advice</p> <p>Vaccine production</p> <p>Introduction of immunisation programmes, monitoring of vaccine efficacy & vaccine coverage</p> <p>Evaluation of new antimicrobials against 'problem' isolates</p>	<p>Zoonoses</p> <p>Vector-borne infections</p> <p>Environmental monitoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Radiation - Chemical - Animal food-stuffs <p>Risk assessment</p> <p>Food safety</p> <p>Disinfectant testing</p> <p>Decontamination confirmation</p> <p>Effects of climate change</p>	<p>Typing of organisms</p> <p>Confirm laboratory test results (including atypical results)</p> <p>Serodiagnosis & molecular assays</p> <p>Identification of unusual or difficult & dangerous (containment level 4) pathogens</p> <p>Antimicrobial resistance confirmation & mechanism determination</p> <p>National & international official designation reference services</p> <p>National & international reference collections</p> <p>Detection of pathogenicity and virulence determinants (including biotoxins)</p> <p>Specialist <i>in vivo</i> and <i>ex vivo</i> assays</p> <p>Forensic pathology</p> <p>Esoteric assays, otherwise unavailable elsewhere</p>	<p>Contribute to national & international guidelines and policy development</p> <p>National and international quality assurance schemes</p> <p>Establishment of quality systems</p> <p>Provision of specialist biological reagents</p> <p>Development of standards</p> <p>Development of testing algorithms</p> <p>Evaluation of diagnostic kits/tests/methods</p> <p>Development of new kits/tests</p> <p>Provision of assay controls & performance panels</p> <p>Assessment of new technologies</p> <p>Development of standard operating procedures</p>	<p>Evaluate & develop diagnostic and reference technologies</p> <p>Search for new pathogens, & antimicrobial resistances & mechanisms</p> <p>Undertake research, & support the work of others, in animal infections</p> <p>Vaccine development & evaluation</p> <p>Epidemiology of rare & common pathogens</p> <p>Sero-epidemiology & sero-prevalence studies</p> <p>Mathematical models of the spread of infectious diseases</p> <p>Economic evaluation of control programmes</p> <p>Pathology investigations</p>	<p>Develop partnerships between animal health professionals, academia, industry, food manufacturers, ALBs & public health services.</p> <p>Contribute to national strategic policy planning & development</p> <p>Maintain & develop further international networks, particularly in Europe & interactions with e.g. World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), World Trade Organisation, European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)</p> <p>Provide expert advice to farming industry, specialist & general press</p> <p>Interactions with agencies & government departments e.g. devolved administrations, Environment Agency, Department of Health, Food Standards Agency, Ministry of Defence etc.</p> <p>International interactions with e.g. European Commission, EFSA, OIE</p>
	Emergency Preparedness and Response		Supporting International Trade	Expert Advice & Consultancy	Training and Education
	<p>Animal intoxication and chemical safety of food</p> <p>Infectious disease emergencies</p> <p>High volume testing</p> <p>Deliberate release response</p> <p>Mathematical models, risk assessment & scenario planning</p> <p>Analytical & predictive epidemiology</p> <p>All hours emergency on-call</p> <p>Service continuity provision to public health</p>		<p>Animal & animal feed compliance with import controls</p> <p>Export compliance certification testing</p>	<p>Provision of expert advice on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Animal health & welfare - Microbiology - Technical issues - Outbreak control - Policy - Biosecurity - Biosafety - Chemical hazards - Radionucleotide hazards - Pathology 	<p>Maintain competency & improve scientific & technical skills of microbiologists & veterinary practitioners</p> <p>Participate in training at international level of lab scientists</p> <p>Participate in post graduate research training</p> <p>Organise & contribute to, national and international training workshops & meetings</p> <p>Contribute to the public understanding of science</p>
Epidemiology and Surveillance					
<p>International surveillance</p> <p>Detection of national outbreaks</p> <p>Syndromic surveillance for new & emerging diseases</p> <p>Sero epidemiology</p> <p>Risk assessment</p>					

Table 1 – VLA's core functions and capabilities

Our services are currently delivered to customers via a series of integrated science programmes:

- Emerging Diseases and Welfare (EDW)
- Food and Environmental Safety (FES)
- Statutory and Exotic Bacterial (SEB) and Viral (SEV) Diseases
- Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSE)
- International Trade
- Commercial
- Strategic Research

We also operate an internal development programme and fellowship initiative that underpins and enhances our scientific capability.

More information about the VLA and the services it provides can be found at www.vla.gov.uk.

2. A NEW FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC AND CORPORATE PLAN

2.1 THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document sets out VLA's new five year strategic and corporate plan for 2009/10 to 2013/14. It is a key communication tool for all VLA stakeholders including our staff. It is imperative that all our stakeholders are clear and supportive about what we do and propose to do. They have been consulted throughout the development of the plan to ensure involvement.

The plan provides:

- A summary of the main factors likely to impact on the VLA.
- A strategic framework to guide and drive the Agency over the next five years.
- A delivery programme, which includes key objectives, the main outputs from the objectives and most importantly the benefits that will be realised for our stakeholders.

It is supported by a hierarchy of operational and science programme strategies (figure 1).

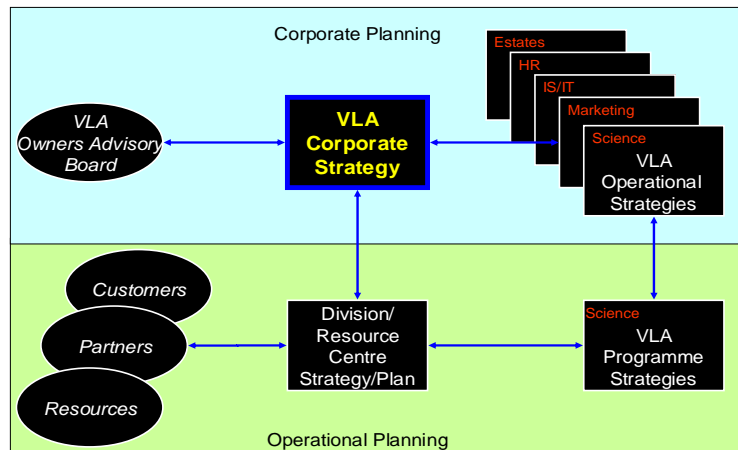


Figure 1 – VLA's Hierarchy of Aligned Strategies

2.2 ANALYSIS OF THE OPERATING CONTEXT

2.2.1 The Changing External Environment

To build a robust and effective strategy account needs to be taken of the external factors likely to impact on the organisation and the market in which we operate. In doing this we must capitalise on new opportunities and address any emerging threats.

Following extensive discussion with our stakeholders (Annex B) the specific factors that we anticipate will impact on our activities include:

Policy Influences Specific to VLA

- **Defra Renew and the changing face and nature of Defra**
 - The contraction of core Defra and the movement to programme and project management will impact on the Defra/VLA relationship. This provides an opportunity for us to increase our profile with Defra stakeholders as well as better inform and influence future policy decisions.
 - The boundary overlap between VLA, components of core Defra, Animal Health and the Institute for Animal Health continues to cause debate; as does the long term sustainability of Defra's science agencies.
- **Financial pressures**
 - Pressure on the public purse and competing priorities for Defra funding increase the risk of reductions to VLA's budget and its animal health protection activities.

- **Defra's Responsibility and Cost Sharing programme**
 - This will impact later in the life of the plan but we need to be proactive and position ourselves accordingly. It will result in a shift in our customer base away from core government to industry, particularly with regard to non-statutory services.

- **Statutory EU Regulations**
 - EU regulations are likely to impact most on our Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs) and Food and Environmental Safety Programmes and result in a continuing demand for intensive services to ensure Member States meet their EU obligations, at the expense of non-statutory work.

- **Government control policies**
 - TB remains a high priority and we are obliged to support quickly and adapt to any policy/funding changes.
 - Reduced funding for TSEs will require VLA to identify ways of retaining core competency in this area.
 - Funding of surveillance for new and emerging animal and zoonotic diseases remains under threat and will require VLA to model new and more affordable approaches to this essential surveillance activity.

- **Devolved policies for animal disease control in Wales and Scotland.**
 - Devolved governments provide a potential increased demand for our services during the life of this plan. Differing emphasis, priorities and policies will create a mixed response portfolio that will need to be managed by VLA.

Cross Government Policy Influences

- **Shared Services**
 - With an increasing drive to rationalise back office service provision across Government, the VLA needs to ensure that appropriate assessment is made of the balance of risk e.g. biosecurity and reduced costs, and that best value is the principle driver.

- **Government HR Policy**
 - Despite devolved pay arrangements, increasingly rigid HM Treasury guidance restricts VLA's ability to tailor its pay structure to the needs of the business.
 - New government/Defra policies on issues such as regional pay and leave entitlement will impact on our current terms and conditions and provide less flexibility in our overall benefits package.
 - Our ability to recruit and retain key skills may be affected.

- **Sustainability Agenda**
 - Defra is the lead department on sustainability issues across government and, as part of the network, we support their initiatives. In addition to general sustainability we must also contribute to 'Sustainability of the Government Estate' (SOG E) targets to reduce carbon emissions.
- **Health and Safety Executive**
 - Awareness of biosecurity is heightened following the 2007 foot and mouth disease outbreak in Surrey and the consequent transfer of responsibility for the Specified Animal Pathogens Order from Defra to the Health and Safety Executive.

High Level Influences Possibly Facing VLA

- **Farming, the Food Chain and Food Security**
 - The changing nature of farming and the food chain, for example the increase in hobby farming, the increase in food importation, the changing face of farming and global levels of food, will all impact on VLA's services.
 - Increasing food prices and concerns over the impact of climate change have raised public awareness of food security issues. Food price, availability and choice of meat and other animal products are an end consequence of increasing demand (population growth and prosperity), the trade-offs between maximum productivity and animal welfare and environmental impact, and public acceptance of scientific advances and intensive farming methods such as hormone induced weight gain and milk production, or of genetically modified feed-stuffs.
 - New and emerging animal diseases and zoonoses as a consequence of increasing globalisation and climate change will also impact on us.
- **Organisation/People**
 - Changing workforce demography, mobility, succession planning and a requirement for changing skills sets need to be accommodated.
- **Technology**
 - The development of increasingly affordable tools and technology platforms for more sophisticated laboratory investigation, data handling and management as well as practical pen-side testing and remote sensing devices will increasingly have an impact on how we deliver our services and the added value from that delivery.
- **Cross Government**
 - Changes in the Cabinet priorities and launching of new initiatives.
 - Corporate and social responsibility including the push on Science and Society by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, is becoming increasingly important.
 - Translating research into practice is recognised across government departments as a priority. Defra's Science Advisory Council has highlighted the importance of integrating social sciences in translational

research that offers optimum practical solutions to ensure a sustainable farming sector contributing to long-term food security for the nation.

Specific Influences Facing VLA from Major Stakeholders

- **Defra**
 - Defra's commitment to Responsibility and Cost Sharing, pressures on the public purse and, in particular, funding pressures for the surveillance function, will impact on the financial sustainability of the VLA in the short to medium term.
- **Animal Health**
 - In many areas services are delivered as part of a tripartite arrangement involving Defra and Animal Health with us. As a result VLA and Animal Health will need to engage better in order to deliver a comprehensive service to customers in an optimally efficient and integrated way.
- **Institute for Animal Health/Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council**
 - Independent reviews, both before and after the foot and mouth outbreak in 2007, and the Government response to them, recommended even further collaborations and activity integration.
- **Private Sector**
 - The market for government/statutory testing is opening up to private laboratories and so will result in more immediate competition. However, the open market approach provides greater opportunities for us to participate in the competitive private market.
 - Increasing consolidation of farm animal veterinary practices into larger conglomerates with changing service requirements will also provide some further opportunities to provide specialist and focused services.
- **European Union**
 - The UK and Defra are playing a leading role in increasing harmonisation of disease research priorities within the EU, which presents opportunities to us; as does an increasing share of total available income from the EU. There is also likely to be an increasing need for us to provide evidence and expert opinion for the EU regulatory function. We also need to more fully exploit the fact that zoonoses are now a consideration of the European Centre for Disease Control.
- **Health Protection Agency**
 - Increased strategic fit between the HPA and the VLA in relation to national public health and zoonoses will provide new opportunities for shared activities in areas such as emerging zoonotic diseases and microbiological and chemical food safety.

- **Food Standards Agency**
 - Income from the FSA is following a downward trend with a shift to shorter term projects accompanied by increased consultancy.
 - Their influence is increasing by leading the UK's strategy on improving safety of feed and food, and they remain an important stakeholder.

- **Home Office**
 - There is a continuing requirement for specialist services via the national network of Laboratories to ensure optimum preparedness and response to biological threat.

2.2.2 Our Internal Environment

We continually assess our strengths and weaknesses and respond to the findings to ensure that we meet the challenges from opportunities and threats in the external environment.

Working with our stakeholders (Annex B) we have identified our key strengths, as well as areas that need improvement in terms of our outputs. This is supplemented by information from staff opinion surveys to address management and other input factors.

Our key strengths are:

- The individual and collective knowledge, experience and expertise of our workforce. A high proportion of staff feel that they have access to the necessary training and information to do their job well; and they value the interesting nature of the work they do. All these factors impact on overall staff satisfaction, engagement and motivation.
- Our collective rapid emergency response capability and the willingness to pull together and get the job done.
- Excellent central and regional laboratory and animal facilities. Staff satisfaction is high with respect to physical working conditions, family friendly policies and the benefits package.
- Organisational adaptability and our ability to respond quickly to customers changing needs in the event of an emergency.
- An extensive world-wide collaborative and intelligence network, which spans formal agreements between similar organisations to informal arrangements between individual scientists and their teams. This is indirectly linked to our strong international brand, which has evolved over our 100 year history.
- Our important role as official reference laboratories nationally and for the OIE, FAO, EFSA and the EU.
- A high quality service, which is in part evidenced by our wide range of third party accreditations.

Areas where further development is required are:

- Over-reliance on Defra funding, with around 90% of our income derived from them. We are therefore extremely sensitive to any pressure on their budget.
 - High fixed costs (staff and facilities) impact on the cost of our operation and on our prices. Both our people and our facilities are identified as key strengths, which presents us with a tension.
 - Our profile is limited with key customer and other stakeholder groups. As a consequence our achievements are often taken for granted – by us and by our customers.
 - Like many large well established organisation our processes have evolved over time and in many cases may be overly complicated and bureaucratic. This is sometimes exacerbated by the requirement for us to comply with public sector processes and initiatives. Taken together, these factors impact negatively on our overall organisational adaptability and flexibility.
 - As with many public sector organisations staff perception of pay, grading, reward systems and progression is poor.
 - A high proportion of staff feel that they do not have a voice and have insufficient opportunity to contribute their views.
-

3. OVERARCHING STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

VLA's strategic framework described in this section, and illustrated in figure 2, shows a clear alignment between the issues identified in the changing environments described above and how we will meet the challenges presented through delivery of:

- Our vision and mission.
- The key drivers as defined in our overarching strategy.
- A series of measurable objectives.
- The outputs from these objectives and the benefits that they will deliver to our stakeholders.

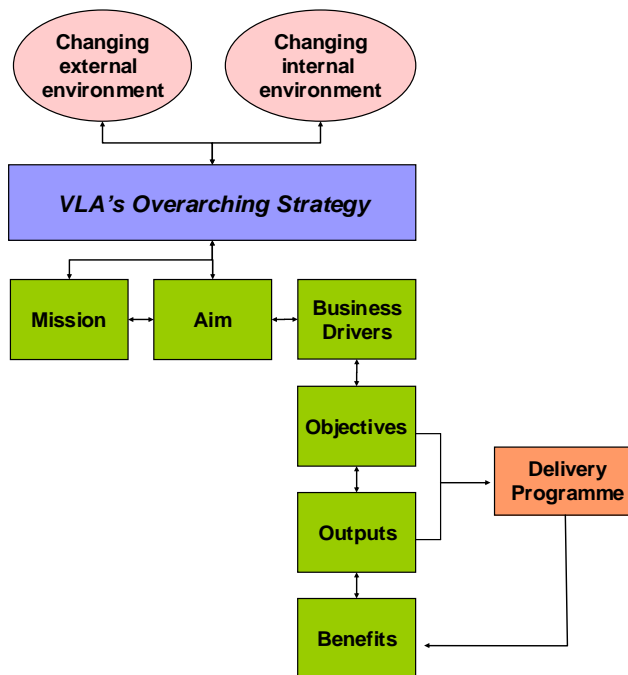


Figure 2 – VLA's Strategic Framework

3.1 OUR STRATEGY

VLA's overarching strategy describes what we must do to take the agency forward over the next five years and to realise our Vision of 'being the best and being seen as the best'.

Our Vision is benefits driven and our key purpose is to help deliver the Government's overall aims and objectives for veterinary public health and sustainable agriculture and food industries. In doing this our science will advise and inform evidence-based policy making, both at the national and international level.

Our strategy is written in recognition that there are many changes and consequent decisions that are far reaching and over which VLA has limited control. As a result our overriding strategy is based on the development of a flexible and agile organisation that can respond quickly to changed circumstances. Within this context the strategy is constructed around a series of key drivers.

3.1.1 Profile, Influence and Customer Responsiveness

Profile and Influence - VLA has a strong international brand. Many stakeholders commented that VLA is often better known internationally than nationally.

Our limited profile with some key UK stakeholders is recognised as an area that needs improvement. This is particularly noticeable outside immediate customer groups within Defra and amongst industry bodies. The latter will be fundamental with the onset of Defra's Responsibility and Cost Sharing Programme. If we are to realise our Vision we must address this and ensure that we are recognised as a centre of excellence nationally as well as internationally.

Aside from potentially attracting more business, increasing our profile will enable us to influence key decision makers in the animal and public health environment so that we can help direct the future of veterinary science and animal health. Our aim is to be a leader in our chosen market as opposed to a passive responder.

A high national and international profile will also enable us to attract the very best scientists for employment and as collaborative partners.

Market and Customer Focus - We need to enhance our understanding of the market in which we operate – both from a government and commercial perspective – so that we can meet or even exceed our customers' expectations and expand our business. We will investigate new markets both for existing and new services.

Our market evaluation will take account of Defra's Responsibility and Cost Sharing Programme, which will radically change the face of the animal health and welfare market. It will also take account of the increasing importance of the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales; and their different requirements.

Market analysis will provide the foundation for enhancing customer satisfaction across all our customer groups. We will monitor progress towards this on an annual basis with the aim of a rolling average of 85% satisfaction rate in all customer groups.

Delivery of public and veterinary science to Government requires seamless relationships with a number of delivery partners. With respect to animal health and welfare our key delivery partners are Defra and our sister agency – Animal Health. Developing a strong strategic alliance with Animal Health is an important element of this strategy.

We will also continue to develop our relationship with the FSA and the HPA so that we can influence and contribute to public health objectives.

The VLA will continue to play a major role in control of endemic disease of farmed livestock in Great Britain. We will provide the laboratory support and expertise to Defra's and the livestock sector's control programmes for endemic notifiable and reportable diseases and infections, such as scrapie, tuberculosis and salmonellosis.

We will continue to support the control of the other endemic diseases of livestock nationally through provision of our diagnostic and advisory services to private veterinary surgeons and their livestock clients. Over the course of this plan the VLA will expand its services to the livestock sector with the launch of a testing and consultancy service, which will contribute to industry led herd and flock health planning initiatives.

We will evaluate the need to strengthen our engagement with companion and leisure animal diseases in the context of our new and emerging threats and reservoirs for livestock infection.

3.1.2 Excellent Scientific Knowledge and Services

A key element in this plan is to ensure that within five years the VLA is still recognised as the leading national source and a key international source of scientific evidence, advice and services for animal health and zoonoses. It will be informed by the latest scientific developments as well as information gathered as part of Defra's Evidence Programme.

Key scientific drivers in the strategy are:

- Scientific functions and responses
- Intelligence/horizon scanning
- Technology and methodology developments
- Consultancy and advice
- Making a difference

We will continue to deliver our science through scientific programmes as one of the twin pillars of our matrix management. The second pillar comprises the scientific facilities, resources and skill sets to deliver our scientific work. Nevertheless we will review and modify, if necessary, our current structure to ensure our science programmes, disciplines, resources and facilities are all working together in a fully integrated manner towards our vision and key drivers and objectives.

We will seek to develop and to utilise new technological advances in the biological and physical sciences that will improve our services, data handling and analysis, and communications. This will be facilitated by development of a five year research strategy that will underpin the overall corporate strategy.

This strategy will be the foundation for our individual supporting science programme strategies, which we will develop to match customer requirements. We will continue to challenge these strategies using external experts.

Scientific discipline development within our matrix structure will be a key plank in this strategy. We will also remove any unnecessary bureaucracy and facilitate flexibility to ensure that all our scientific developments and advances benefit everyone.

We will also strengthen our PhD training programme, where possible jointly with universities and other agencies.

The quality of our science and supporting systems is paramount and we will look to retain our existing third party quality certifications. We will further develop a culture of continual improvement.

VLA's national and international leadership on a wide range of infectious and non-infectious diseases of farm animals is recognised through our network of reference laboratories. We will strategically review and develop our network and raise their profile and influence as a global flagship service.

We will collaborate extensively via a mix of formal and informal collaborative agreements, which will enrich our skills and widen our access to specialist facilities. In doing this we will continue to provide a one stop service to our customers.

Providing a safe and biosecure working environment is of utmost importance to the Agency. Our intention is that we will become viewed as a role model by the Health and Safety Executive.

3.1.3 Sustainability, Efficiency and Flexibility

Sustainability - Long term financial sustainability is critical; not only for us but also for Defra as our owner. A key element to achieving financial sustainability will be to develop and increase revenue from new customers within Defra as well as new and existing customers in the commercial sector, the EU and in other Government departments. The intention is that our market analysis and the drive to increase our profile will help us achieve this goal.

In particular we aim to double commercial income over the life of this plan. We will continue to look toward our commercial profits as a valuable source of revenue for investment in new technologies and skills, in support of service delivery.

We also need a core funding stream that allows us to optimise flexibility and local resource decision making. To achieve this we will explore new funding approaches and models with Defra as indicated in the 2007 quinquennial science review of the VLA.

We will honour our corporate and social responsibilities (CSR) by ensuring that we interact with our wider stakeholders – such as suppliers, interest groups, the local community and societies as a whole. This includes our environmental impact as well as the communication of science that has implications for the public.

As part of our CSR we remain committed to the Government's Science and Society Programme and will look to further develop our profile and standing within the wider science community via support to schools, universities and veterinary schools. Our aim is to play our part in helping promote greater public engagement and greater enjoyment and confidence in science and increase the number of young people taking up science as a career.

Operational Efficiency - Immediate financial pressure on the budget for scanning surveillance has necessitated a review to improve the efficiency of delivery early in the life of this plan. The importance of scanning surveillance is well recognised by Defra and we will work with them to explore how we can reduce the cost while improving the effectiveness of the service.

We will examine our key processes – both science and administrative - to ensure that they fully support business requirements in the most efficient way. In doing this we will use new technology wherever possible - in particular at the interface with our customers - to improve delivery.

Maintaining excellent facilities across the UK is a significant fixed cost to the Agency. Whilst these facilities are a key strength to VLA we will look to optimise utilisation of the entire estate so that we can minimise costs. We will also explore opportunities to co-ordinate and share facilities, especially high containment facilities, with others. We will do this at the same time as meeting Defra's requirements on the delivery of a sustainable estate and with minimal impact on the environment.

Flexibility of Resources - The environment in which we operate is constantly changing. Organisational adaptability in times of emergency is already one of our recognised strengths but we must strive to be more flexible in resource use across our entire estate so that we can continue to meet customers' changing demands. This must be reflected in our structure, working patterns, systems and reward package. Reviewing our key processes and procedures will also contribute to the development of a more flexible and agile organisation. In addition, integrated business support strategies will be developed and updated to underpin this plan.

A key priority to help us build a flexible resource is the development of a strategic human resource plan, which covers people management, motivation and the availability and deployment of skills and knowledge. Our overarching aim is to ensure that the knowledge, skills and abilities contained within our staff pool are deployed and used to maximum effect in order to create value in the organisation. The intangible value that lies in our people is generally accepted as having a direct impact on our long term sustained performance.

4. IMPLEMENTATION AND DELIVERY PROGRAMME

We are committed to our strategy being outputs and benefits driven. At the outset we assessed the benefits to be delivered and then objectives were constructed to ensure these benefits will be realised. Delivery of these objectives on an annual basis will be through the corporate scorecard, which cascades through the organisation at the divisional and local level through to individual objectives.

Key elements – those that are largely new initiatives rather than maintenance of normal business – will be collectively delivered through a Delivery Programme

integrated within the corporate scorecard and driven via work packages with exacting measurable targets that will gauge the success of our strategy.

In summary the strategic objectives are:

Profile, Influence and Responsiveness

- Raise VLA's profile with key stakeholders, improve image and increase influence proactively with Defra, the EU and other Government departments.
- Understand customers, their needs and values and the changing market.
- Develop a strategic alliance with Animal Health and define areas for collaboration and alignment.

Excellent Scientific Knowledge and Services

- Produce and implement the VLA R&D plan 2009-14 to ensure VLA is the leading national source and a key international source of scientific evidence, advice and services for animal health and zoonoses.
- Embrace new technology.
- Strengthen our PhD programme.
- Continue to improve health and safety.

Sustainability, Efficiency and Flexibility

- As an output from raising our profile and understanding the needs and values of our customers we will protect, develop and increase revenue from all possible resources and maximally exploit intellectual assets with the intent of becoming less dependent on Defra funding.
- Maintain a sustainable and sufficiently sensitive surveillance capability for 2009-2014.
- Make efficiency savings over the period 2009-2014 by streamlining common cross cutting processes.
- Optimise utilisation of the VLA estate.
- Develop a strategic HR agenda.

ANNEX A - Key Government Objectives that Influence VLA's Overall Strategy

Defra's Purpose:

To secure a healthy environment in which we and future generations can prosper'.

Defra's Public Service Agreement (PSA 28):

Secure a healthy natural environment for everyone's well being, health and prosperity, now and in the future.

Defra's three priorities are:

- Secure a healthy natural environment for us all and deal with environmental risks
- Promote a sustainable, low-carbon and resource-efficient economy
- Ensure a thriving farming sector and a sustainable, healthy and secure food supply

Defra's Departmental Strategic Objectives that relate to VLA are:

DSO4 – An economy and society that are resilient to environmental risk

DSO6 – A thriving farming and food sector with an improving net environmental impact

DSO7 – A sustainable, secure and healthy food supply

Defra's vision for its agencies:

To provide Defra and other customers with effective and sustainable world-class scientific services to meet government's expressed needs.

The GB Animal Health & Welfare Strategy aims to:

Develop a new partnership in which we can make a lasting and continuous improvement in the health and welfare of kept animals while protecting society, the economy, and the environment from the affect of animal diseases.

The aims of the Food Standards Agency for 2005-10 that relate to VLA are:

- To continue to reduce foodborne illness.
- To reduce further the risks to consumers from chemical contamination including radiological contamination of food.

ANNEX B – VLA Stakeholders Consulted

