



**Veterinary  
Laboratories  
Agency®**

VLA is an Executive Agency of the  
Department for Environment, Food and  
Rural Affairs

*Safeguarding  
public and animal  
health*

FIVE YEAR STRATEGIC AND  
CORPORATE  
**PLAN**  
**2009**



*The way forward*

# A message from the Chief Executive

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 VLA as the leading national and 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 they are focussed on the delivery of benefits to our customers and wider stakeholders. The aim is that our science and expertise will advise and inform national and international evidence-based policy making.

*Our objectives are based 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

## Our mission

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

## Our vision

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**

# VLA's core **functions** and **capabilities**

In broad terms, VLA delivers 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 government delivery partners as well as via collaborations with veterinary and scientific organisations in the UK and overseas.

**VLA's services comprise a wide range of inter-related core functions and capabilities as follows:**



## Disease Prevention and Control

- Provide reference microbiology and surveillance for:
  - bacteria
  - viruses
  - fungi
  - parasites
  - prions
- International reference services support
- Support disease outbreak investigation
- Detect and monitor emerging and imported infectious diseases and antimicrobial resistances
- Search for new pathogens
- Vector-borne diseases
- Zoonoses
- General and on-call support and expert advice
- Vaccine production
- Introduction of immunisation programmes, monitoring of vaccine efficacy and vaccine coverage
- Evaluation of new antimicrobials against 'problem' isolates

## Epidemiology and Surveillance

- International surveillance
- Detection of national outbreaks
- Syndromic surveillance for new and emerging diseases
- Sero-epidemiology
- Risk assessment



## Environmental and Public Health Protection

- Zoonoses
- Vector-borne infections
- Environmental monitoring:
  - radiation
  - chemical
  - animal foodstuffs
- Risk assessment
- Food safety
- Disinfectant testing
- Decontamination confirmation
- Effects of climate change
- Wildlife infection reservoirs



## Emergency Preparedness and Response

- All hours emergency on-call
- Animal intoxication and chemical safety of food
- Infectious disease emergencies
- High volume testing
- Deliberate release response
- Mathematical models, risk assessment and scenario planning
- Analytical and predictive epidemiology
- Service continuity provision to public health



## Reference and Specialised Testing

- Typing of organisms
- Confirm laboratory test results (including atypical results)
- Sero-diagnosis and molecular assays
- Identification of unusual or difficult and dangerous (containment level 4) pathogens
- Antimicrobial resistance confirmation and mechanism determination
- National and international official designation reference services
- National and international reference collections
- Detection of pathogenicity and virulence determinants (including biotoxins)
- Specialist *in vivo* and *ex vivo* assays
- Forensic pathology
- Esoteric assays, unavailable elsewhere



### Regulation, Policy Development and Quality

- Contributions to national and international guidelines and policy development
- National and international quality assurance schemes
- Establishment of quality systems
- Provision of specialist biological reagents
- Development of standards
- Development of testing algorithms
- Evaluation of diagnostic kits, tests and methods
- Development of new kits and tests
- Provision of assay controls and performance panels
- Assessment of new technologies
- Development of standard operating procedures

### Animal Health Related Research

- Evaluate and develop diagnostic and reference technologies
- Search for new pathogens and antimicrobial resistances and mechanisms
- Undertake research and support the work of others in animal infections
- Vaccine development and evaluation
- Epidemiology of rare and common pathogens
- Sero-epidemiology and sero-prevalence studies
- Mathematical models of the spread of infectious diseases
- Economic evaluation of control programmes
- Pathology investigations



### Supporting International Trade

- Animal and animal feed compliance with import controls
- Export compliance certification testing



### Expert Advice and Consultancy

- Provision of expert advice on:
  - animal health and welfare
  - microbiology
  - technical issues
  - outbreak control
  - policy
  - biosecurity
  - biosafety
  - chemical hazards
  - radionucleotide hazards
  - pathology



### Enabling Partnerships and Communication

- Develop partnerships between animal health professionals, academia, industry, food manufacturers, arm's length bodies and public health services
- Contribute to national strategic policy planning and development
- Maintain and develop further international networks, particularly in Europe, and interactions with, for example, World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), World Trade Organisation and European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)
- Provide expert advice to the farming industry, specialist and general press
- Interactions with agencies and government departments, for example devolved administrations, Environment Agency, Department of Health, Food Standards Agency and Ministry of Defence
- International interactions with, for example, European Commission, EFSA and OIE

### Training and Education

- Maintain competency and improve scientific and technical skills of microbiologists and veterinary practitioners
- Participate in the training of laboratory scientists at international level
- Participate in postgraduate research training
- Organise and contribute to national and international training workshops and meetings
- Contribute to the public understanding of science



**VLA's 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 Diseases (SEB)

Statutory and Exotic Viral Diseases (SEV)

Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSE)

International Trade

Commercial

Strategic Research

# Responding to environmental changes

To build a robust and effective strategy, we need to take into account the internal and external factors likely to impact on our organisation and the market in which we operate.



## The Changing External Environment

### Policy influences specific to VLA

- Defra *Renew* and a changing Defra
- Financial pressures
- Statutory EU regulations
- Government control policies
- Devolved policies for animal disease control in Wales and Scotland.

### Cross Government policy influences

- Shared services
- Government human resource policy
- Sustainability agenda
- Transfer of responsibility for the Specified Animal Pathogens Order to Health and Safety Executive

### High level influences possibly facing VLA

- Changing nature of farming, the food chain and food security
- Changing skill sets and succession planning
- Development of increasingly affordable tools and technology platforms

### Specific influences facing VLA from major stakeholders

- Defra's responsibility and cost sharing programme
- Defra, Animal Health and VLA tripartite for delivery
- Collaboration with Institute for Animal Health
- Competitive private market and consolidation of farm animal veterinary practices with changing service requirements
- Increasing harmonisation of disease research priorities in the EU and requirement for expert opinion
- Increasing strategic fit between the Health Protection Agency and VLA in dealing with zoonoses
- Shift to shorter term projects/consultancy for Food Standards Agency.

## VLA's Changing Internal Environment

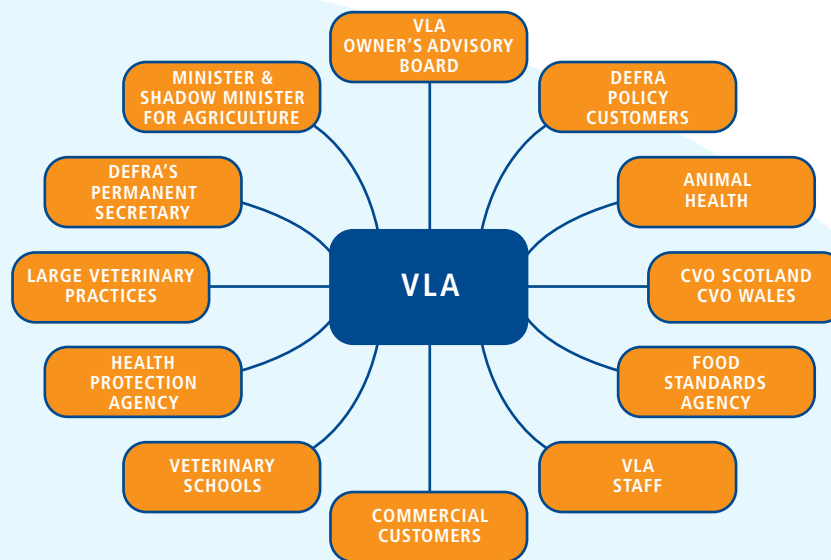
We continually assess our strengths and weaknesses and respond to the findings to ensure that we meet the challenges from opportunities and threats in the external environment. Working with our stakeholders we have identified our key strengths as well as areas that need improvement. This is supplemented by information from staff opinion surveys to address management and other input factors.

### VLA's key strengths are:

- Individual and collective knowledge, experience and expertise of our workforce
- Collective rapid emergency response capability
- Excellent central and regional laboratories and animal facilities
- Organisational adaptability and ability to respond quickly to customers' changing needs
- An extensive worldwide collaborative and intelligence network
- Important role as a national and international reference laboratory
- High quality service

VLA's new five year **Strategic and Corporate Plan** is a key communication tool for all its stakeholders, including staff. It is imperative that all our stakeholders are clear and supportive about what we do and propose to do.

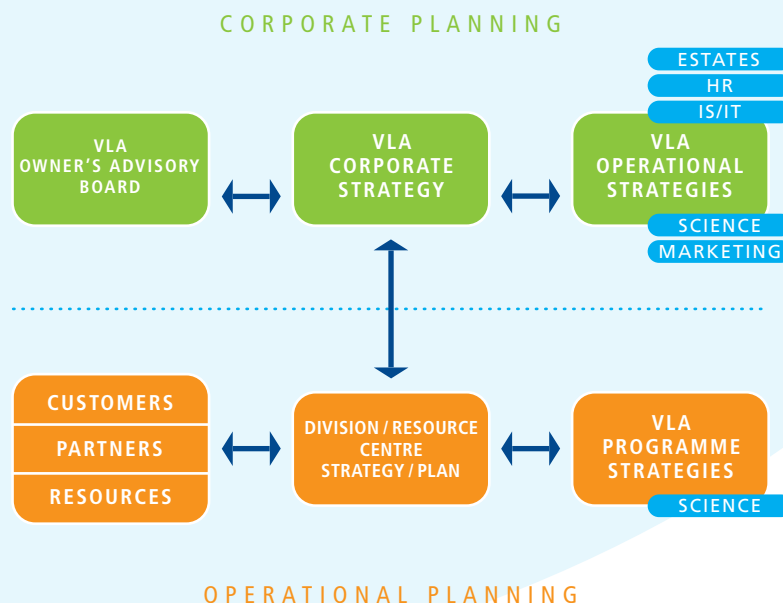
**Our stakeholders have been consulted throughout the development of the Plan to ensure their involvement.**



The plan provides:

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

**The Plan is supported by a hierarchy of operational and science programme strategies.**



# Ready to meet the challenges ahead

Our strategy is based on the 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 changing circumstances.

**Within this context the three business drivers and strategic objectives are:**

## 1 Profile, Influence and Responsiveness

- Raise VLA's profile with key stakeholders, improve our image and proactively increase our influence with Defra, the EU and other government departments

### Output

- Stakeholder communications plan

### Benefits

- Protect and enhance VLA's reputation
- Enhance influence
- Joined-up policy and delivery

- Understand customers, their needs and values and the changing market

### Output

- Customer requirement definition
- Marketing plan

### Benefits

- Customer satisfaction
- Identification of strategic, high priority services

- Develop a strategic alliance with Animal Health and define areas for collaboration and alignment

### Output

- Memorandum of understanding

### Benefits

- Joined-up delivery and aligned services
- Improved communication
- Improved emergency response capability



## 2 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

### Output

- Five-year R&D plan
- Increased number and impact of science publications
- Postgraduate training programme and scholarships
- Scientific investment programme

### Benefits

- Recognised centre of excellence worldwide
- Top grade scientists and new blood to invigorate scientific innovation
- Increased customer confidence and ability to influence decision makers
- Regarded as 'preferred' collaborator
- Increased scientific and discipline development

- Continue to improve health and safety

### Output

- Safety improvement action plan

### Benefits

- Increased safety awareness and fewer safety incidents
- Effective biosecurity
- Regarded as a role model by the Health and Safety Executive

VLA's strategic framework shows a clear alignment between the issues identified in the changing environment, and how we will meet the resulting challenges.



## 3 Sustainability, Efficiency and Flexibility

- From raising our profile, understanding the needs of our customers and exploiting intellectual assets we will protect and increase revenue from all possible resources to become less dependent on Defra funding

### Output

- Challenging revenue targets

### Benefits

- Increased financial sustainability from multiple sources
- Wider customer base
- Ability to fund key areas of science not funded by Government

- Maintain a sustainable and sufficiently sensitive surveillance capability for 2009/14

### Output

- Implementation of options appraisal study

### Benefits

- Sustainable and effective scanning surveillance capability
- Affordable service to Defra and contribution to UK livestock industry

- Make efficiency savings over the period 2009/14 by streamlining common cross-cutting processes

### Output

- Implementation of a business process review

### Benefits

- Simplified, more efficient business processes
- Staff able to concentrate on value-adding activities

- Optimise use of the VLA estate

### Output

- Updated building and estates strategy

### Benefits

- A sustainable estate
- Greater proportion of Defra's budgets spent on science
- A national resource, coordinated with other national providers

- Develop a strategic HR agenda

### Output

- Refreshed HR strategy

### Benefits

- Recognised as a good employer
- Recruit and retain core and future skills



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