

Chapter 1- Introduction

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Relevant references The following terms are used through out the Manual for Official Controls.

Term	Previous equivalents
Food business operator (FBO)	Occupier / owner
Establishment	Plant
Approval number	Licence number

Section 1 – Background and functions

Section Overview

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VPHU background

VPHU status The Veterinary Public Health Unit (VPHU) is a service delivery unit of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) Veterinary Service (VS).

VPHU purpose VPHU purpose is the protection of public health and animal welfare in approved meat establishment, through proportionate enforcement. In addition VPHU maintains vigilance for and deals appropriately with specified animal diseases.

In fulfilling its purpose the VPHU delivers work to both DARD and the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

In Great Britain the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) fulfils this role.

VPHU contribution to VS mission The Veterinary Service Mission Statement declares: -
“The Veterinary Service will serve all its customers effectively and efficiently, protecting the consumer, the public and animals through the application and enforcement of veterinary public health, animal health and welfare legislation.”

VPHU objectives

VPHU objectives are:

(a) to consistently and effectively enforce all relevant public health and animal health and welfare legislation, and provide supervision, inspection services, and audit, in approved slaughter and cutting establishment;

(b) to deliver efficient, high quality services, exploiting technology, and constantly strive for excellence;

(c) to achieve the performance targets set by the FSA;

(d) to achieve the performance targets set by DARD; and

(e) to operate in an open, accountable and independent way, respecting legislative requirements, and promoting inclusion and involvement.

VPHU functions

Principal functions

The principal functions of the VPHU in approved slaughter and cutting establishment are listed in the table below together with the Government Department that holds the policy lead.

FUNCTION...	POLICY lead...
Provision of official controls in respect of meat: audit, verification, inspection and health marking as appropriate.	FSA
Enforcement of Food Hygiene Regulations in approved slaughterhouses, cutting establishment and for minced meat and meat preparations where these activities are performed within approved slaughterhouses and cutting establishment.	FSA
Enforcement of TSE regulations and animal by-products regulations within approved slaughterhouses and cutting establishment.	FSA, DARD
Enforcement of animal welfare regulations at slaughterhouses.	DARD
Collection and despatch of samples for statutory veterinary medicines residue testing and testing of suspect cases	DARD, VMD
Collection and despatch of sheep brain stem samples for the testing of TSEs.	DARD
Supervision of cattle TSE testing.	DARD
Collection and despatch of samples for examination and testing for some notifiable diseases.	DARD
Provision of export certification when required by the importing authority or by European Community (EC) rules.	DARD
Provision of services for animal traceability.	DARD
Supervision of cattle disposal schemes (Over Thirty Month Scheme (OTMS), Older Cow Disposal Scheme (OCDS))	DARD, RPA
Handling of Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (FQAS) data	LMC

Section 2 – Relationship with various bodies

Section overview

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Introduction

Stakeholders and customers

The VPHU has many stakeholders and customers, primarily consumers and the public, but also including:

- DARD Departments and Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
- Food Standards Agency
- Other Government agencies
- Government Ministers / Members of the Legislative Assembly
- Meat industry
- Staff and their professional / representative organisations
- District councils
- Farming industry
- Animal welfare organisations
- European Union
- Meat Hygiene Service

Communication

The VPHU approach to customers and stakeholders, including food business operators (FBOs) and their operatives must be:

- courteous,
- professional,
- considerate, and
- patient.

VPHU officers must always make a clear distinction between statutory requirements and recommendations of best practice. All advice and enforcement action should comply with the enforcement policy.

Reference: See chapter 7 Enforcement for additional information.

DARD

Responsibility

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland (DARD) is the competent authority responsible for animal health including animal movement and animal welfare legislation, residues legislation and trade matters.

Executive Agencies

The VPHU carries out work of DARD on behalf of the following Defra Executive Agencies:

- Rural Payments Agency (RPA),
 - Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) for medicinal residues
-

Work on behalf of DARD

The table in topic “**VPHU Functions**” outlines the work that the VPHU undertakes on behalf of DARD and on behalf of Defra agencies.

Reference: See section “VPHU Functions” in this chapter for additional information.

The Food Standards Agency

Responsibility	FSA is the competent authority responsible for public health legislation. The FSA represents the UK government on food safety and standards issues in the European Union.
Principles	The FSA operate under the following guiding principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• putting the consumer first• being open and accessible• being an independent voice
Relationship to VPHU	The VPHU carries out work on behalf of the FSA in accordance with a service level agreement.
Performance targets	<p>The FSA set the VPHU annual performance targets aligned to the FSA strategic plan.</p> <p>The current performance targets are available on the VPHU intranet site.</p>
Contact details	<p>The FSA can be contacted via their website:</p> <p>http://www.food.gov.uk/aboutus/contactus/</p>

District councils

DC purpose The district councils (DCs) provide a range of services directly to the local communities which includes food law enforcement in respect of food hygiene and food standards (i.e. the composition and labeling of food).

DC Food Enforcement Officers DC food enforcement officers (mainly environmental health officers (EHO)) are responsible for enforcement of the majority of food law in the majority of food establishment ranging from major national manufacturers to very small seasonal poultry the slaughterhouses including butcher shops and catering establishments. They also investigate food complaints from consumers and are responsible for the enforcement of food safety law in cases of illegal slaughter.

The parts of food law not enforced by the district councils are those that are enforced by VPHU in approved slaughter and cutting establishment. Please note however that the DC does have a role in enforcing food standards (composition and labeling) even in establishment supervised by VPHU. In addition DC enforce food safety requirements in relation to meat products and edible co-products (e.g. processed stomachs, bladders & casings).

VPHU and Environmental Health Officers

VPHU officers liaise with EHOs about:

- complaints to district councils / EHOs from the public relating to meat
- meat hygiene issues outside approved establishment
- food standards issues.

Relationships

Effective communication between VPHU staff and DC enforcement officers is essential. Communication can:

- identify local risks and concerns,
- promote understanding of individual pressures and priorities,
- facilitate successful enforcement activities with the most effective use of local resource.

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District councils, Continued

Means of communication

Local Authority Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS) and the VPHU recommend that local communication channels be maintained, for example, by:

- Proactive and informal communication when DC enforcement officers are attending slaughterhouses.
 - Maintaining ongoing discussions in relation to referrals or areas of common interest.
 - Considering possible joint local training opportunities, and sharing of information.
-

Partnership working

Effective partnership working by the VPHU and district councils will help achieve enforcement objectives and will also be resource effective.

Requests for information should be handled promptly, with reference where necessary to VPHU support staff.

Local contacts

It is useful to maintain a list of local contacts for the establishment.

Meat industry

Liaison with industry

As well as day-to-day dealings with FBOs, the VPHU also liaises with industry stakeholders through their representative organisations.

While there is no formal NI industry forum equivalent to the MHS Industry Forum, meetings do take place between industry representative bodies and Veterinary Service to discuss operational matters.

Meat Hygiene Policy Forum

The FSA Meat Hygiene Policy Forum discusses future policy and its implementation. The MHPF comprises meat industry and other stakeholder representatives including the MHS and DARD.

Section 3 – VPHU communication and guidance

Section overview

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Lines of communication

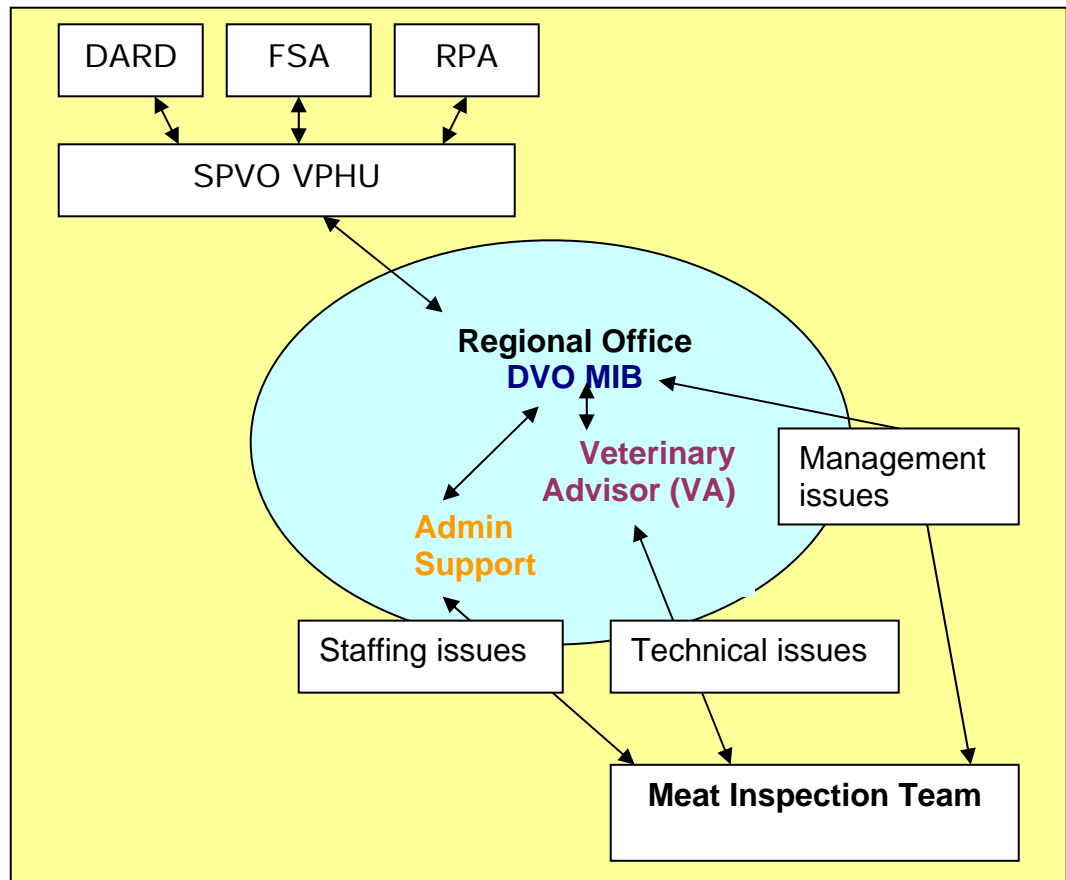
Communication procedure

So that we can work efficiently and effectively it is important that we have procedures in place to deal with communications and queries for all VPHU staff to follow.

Sources of advice

Through the regional office you should be able to get the support and advice both **technical** and **non-technical** that you need from either the Veterinary Advisor (VA) or the Divisional Veterinary Officer, Meat Inspection Branch (DVO MIB).

There may be occasions when requests for technical advice are referred from the regional office to the VPHU Senior Principal Veterinary Officer (SPVO) who will in turn liaise with / consult the relevant part of DARD, FSA or RPA as appropriate.



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Lines of communication, Continued

APHIS support

The Animal and Public Health Information System is central to many VPHU functions. **APHIS** support is provided through ASU. The rota for APHIS out-of-hours on-call can be found on the ASU intranet site.

Note: ASU officers cannot answer mobiles while driving so leave a message and they will get back to you within 20 minutes.

Contact numbers are:

	Telephone No
North Region	028 7034 1035
South Region	028 3025 3237
APHIS 09.00-17.00, Mon - Fri	028 9052 5048 028 9052 5049 028 9052 4997
APHIS out-of-hours on-call numbers	077 8810 8719 OR check rota on intranet 077 8810 8720

FBOs seeking advice

Where a food business operator (FBO) asks for advice from their OV, SMI or P/MI, and the officer is confident of the advice that should be given there is no need for referral. A record of the request and advice given should be made in the logbook. Where the request is beyond the knowledge of the officer asked for it should be referred to the regional office.

Manuals and guides

Manual for Official Controls

This manual provides details of the tasks, responsibilities and duties for VPHU officers, including:

- inspection
- verification and audit
- health marking
- decision making and actions to be taken following official controls
- sampling procedures
- monitoring and surveillance programmes.

All VPHU officers must be aware of and follow the instructions in this manual. The OV is responsible for ensuring that all members of the team read and understand the instructions and is also responsible for making the FBO aware of any changes to the manual.

Updates to electronic manual

When a change is issued the intranet version will be automatically updated, a notification released on the homepage and an e-mail alert sent to all MITs.

Guide to Food Safety and Other Regulations for the Meat Industry

The Guide to Food Safety and Other Regulations for the Meat Industry (or meat industry guide (MIG) for short) provides guidance on compliance with public health, animal health, and animal welfare legislation for FBOs of approved establishments. It also provides some guidance for OVs when auditing compliance with the legislation.

<http://www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/meat/draftguidehygienemeat>

The MIG has been produced in consultation with, and endorsed by the meat industry, and is designed to assist the FBO in meeting the requirements of the legislation. However use of the MIG by the FBO is voluntary.

Regulation: Regulation (EC) 852/2004, Articles 7 and 8.

Revised pages will be issued by FSA when there are significant changes to existing guidance for FBOs.

Note: VPHU officers can refer to the MIG for guidance on the standards that industry should be achieving.

VPHU logbook

Logbook maintenance

A record of MIT communications must be kept for each MIT. In addition a record of official controls performed at each approved establishment must be kept. The VPHU logbook for each approved establishment provides for both these functions.

The logbook for a MIT headquarters establishment will have both communications and official controls performed recorded while the logbook for satellite premises will record only the official controls performed in relation to that premises. This is to avoid unnecessary duplication of recording.

Communication records in the logbook

It is essential the each MIT maintain a record of key communications, both those received from out-with the MIT and those required for the optimum functioning of the MIT. Such communications are also vital for relief staff performing official controls.

The MIT communication records in the logbook should be used to:

- record and communicate any advice / direction given by regional office – DVO MIB / VA
- bring to the attention of team members new or amended staff instructions.
- record the name, designation and purpose of any visitors to the VPHU MIT
- record the name and times of attendance of relief officers, (regular officers do not need to do this provided they complete the timesheets as appropriate).

The OV should ensure that MIT members indicate that they have read and understood any new instruction by dating and initialling the communication record when such instructions are received.

Key agreements

The first page of the logbook should contain reference to key agreements on procedures between the OV and FBO for example specific ante mortem arrangements regarding clearance for slaughter and communication of directions for slaughter. The logbook should direct the user to where such documented agreements can be found.

VPHU logbook, continued

Official control records in the logbook

The purpose of recording the official controls performed is to provide a record that appropriate controls and where necessary follow up has been performed. In this situation the logbook:

- provides a means of communication between members of the VPHU team regarding official controls, other than routine inspections and health marking in slaughterhouses, performed at the establishment, for example:
 - checks carried out and information gathered to inform audit;
 - audit finding follow up checks performed.
- records any follow up actions to be taken by the VPHU when next in the establishment
- records any specific advice requested by and given to the FBO,

Note: Contemporaneous notes should be recorded in personal official notebook.

Reference: See “Official Notebook”.

Access to logbook

The logbook is the property of the VPHU. All VPHU officers must have ready access to the logbook. The FBO is entitled to see the log of official controls.

All entries in the logbook may be disclosed and must be professional and courteous. The logbook is an open document.

Note: Details of operator non-compliance should not be recorded in the logbook. This will be recorded on the appropriate report form, in the operational report form (VPH 01, 02 or 03) or the enforcement programme (VPH 11) as appropriate. However any follow up action required as a result of the non-compliance needs to be included in the establishment logbook.

Retention

The logbook should be retained at the approved establishment or the appropriate MIT headquarters. Once completed the logbook should be retained for 1 year from the last entry then sent to the DVO MIB for consideration prior to disposal.

VPHU official notebooks

Use of VPHU official notebook

These are to be used for recording contemporaneous notes where a report form is not readily available, for example: where an incident occurs in the lairage that requires facts to be recorded immediately or where the incident witnessed is not directly related to the report being completed at the time.

The use of the notebook is not to replace the relevant report forms for recording of day-to-day activities and is only to be used for recording factual information, which may need to be used for completing a full report or presented at a subsequent prosecution.

Important points

The notebook may be inspected in court and the following guidance must be adhered to in order to maintain validity:

- record name, designation and date started, on the inside front cover
- make all entries with ink or ball pen,
- include only original entries and do not copy notes from elsewhere,
- record the date and time at commencement, and upon completion,
- enter the notes at the time the incident is witnessed or as soon as possible afterwards whilst the facts are fresh in the memory,
- make alterations by striking the pen through the words, writing the correction, and initialling it. **Notes must not be erased.**
- do not remove pages from the notebook,
- sign and date each entry at the base of each page.

The notebook may have to be produced in court and read by all parties so entries must be relevant, factual, legible, concise and written in plain language.

Security

You are responsible for ensuring the security of the notebook and producing it in court. Further notebooks are available at your regional office on return of the completed notebook.

Return of all notebooks

Notebooks remain the property of the VS and **must** be returned to the regional office prior to leaving the VS.

Personal conduct of VPHU officers

Staff conduct VPHU officers should adopt, maintain and demonstrate best practice in the course of their duties and conduct themselves in a professional way at all times.

Personal standards Every person working in a food-handling area is to maintain a high degree of personal cleanliness and is to wear suitable, clean and, where necessary, protective clothing.

Personal hygiene When in food production areas VPHU officers are to wear:

- clean white protective clothing
- hairnets (and beard snoods if appropriate) to cover the hair of the head
- clean waterproof footwear
- no watches, jewellery (except wedding rings) nor aftershave / perfumes.

When working in dirty areas or with livestock:

- designated waterproof footwear and lairage coats.

Operational hygiene When working in any approved establishment, VPHU officers must:

- keep personal equipment clean and change protective clothing as necessary
- use the proper hygiene facilities at all times and in such a way that there is no risk of contamination of meat
- wash contaminated aprons in the apron wash facilities
- only use a dedicated hygiene facility
- wash hands, or gloves, whenever they become soiled, and always after handling detained or rejected product
- use a rubber glove over a chain mail glove to reduce the risk of cross contamination
- use blue, food safe, waterproof dressings to protect cuts

Note: Some FBOs may require that dressings are also metal detectable.

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Personal conduct of VPHU officers, continued

Health status

No person suffering from, or being a carrier of a disease likely to be transmitted through food or afflicted, for example, with infected wounds, skin infections, sores or diarrhoea is to be permitted to handle food or enter any food-handling area in any capacity if there is any likelihood of direct or indirect contamination.

VPHU officers must report significant symptoms and conditions to their line manager.

Notification of whereabouts

The regional office must be in a position to make contact with any VPHU officer at any time while on official duties. Officers should ensure that their line manager is aware or can be made aware of their whereabouts when they are not in their designated establishment.

Authorisation Certificates

OA or P/MI title Regulation (EC) No. 854/2004 uses the term official auxiliaries for poultry / meat inspection officers.

P/MIs can continue to use the title of P/MI except when participating in enforcement action, when the terminology official auxiliary (OA) must be used. Authorisation certificates will also use the term official auxiliary.

Authorisation certificates

Veterinary Service issues officers with authorisation certificates for DARD enforced legislation. The FSA on recommendation from VPHU, issues officers with authorisation certificates depending on their designations.

Sign the authorisation documentation, carry them whilst engaged in official duties, and be prepared to produce them on request. You are responsible for ensuring you possess all relevant authorisations for the establishment where you work.

When ceasing to work for VS return all authorisation certificates to your line manager. Any lost or found authorisation certificates must be reported to your regional office.

Powers of entry

Authorisations give the holder the powers to enter approved establishments within their authority and must be produced upon request. This power of entry is for the purposes of ascertaining contraventions of provisions of the legislation for which they are authorised and the performance of statutory duties and exists at all reasonable hours.

Regulation: The OFFC Regulations (NI) 2006

Action without authorisation

Do not take any enforcement action for which you have not been authorised, as such action is not valid.
