

CLAIMS CONSULTANT - Further Information

Summary

The successful candidate will have gained considerable experience from predominantly small animal general clinical practice, usually over a minimum of 15 years. Excellent communication skills are required. Post-graduate veterinary qualifications are not essential but can be an advantage in handling the complex nature of contemporary claims. A legal qualification is not necessary, although Claims Consultants must possess the ability to acquire legal knowledge and skills relevant to the post when in training. Those who have held office or taken part in committee work in national or regional veterinary associations are likely to have the broad view of the profession, the wide knowledge of its members, networking skills and the understanding of working groups which consistently prove helpful in the performance of the job. Experience of practice management and familiarity with the regulatory requirements of veterinary practice is also likely to be useful. Keyboard skills and an ability to use modern electronic communications are essential features of the job. A Claims Consultant should be a proven team player who can use the interchange of experience and ideas which stem from within the Group and which help in deciding appropriate strategy.

Job description

Purpose and scope of role

Claims Consultants deliver the core service of VDS – that of providing support, advice, and indemnity insurance cover for its member veterinary surgeons when they are facing allegations and claims of professional negligence and/or misconduct.

The role requires substantial experience and a wide-ranging knowledge of current veterinary practice and the wider veterinary industry. Claims Consultants have to read and analyse large volumes of case papers, sometimes of a complex nature. They communicate with claimants, lawyers and veterinary surgeons by letter, email and telephone. They are required to attend Claims Group meetings every month at Knutsford, and also case conferences, court trials and RCVS interviews and Hearings, as they arise, throughout the UK and Ireland.

The position is full time, but, within reason, allows freedom for individuals to organise their own working arrangements consistent with maintaining the momentum and efficiency of the Society's business. This allowance for flexibility is an important feature, consistent with the fact that Claims Consultants are also encouraged to maintain outside interests within the profession, including connectivity with clinical practice so far as is possible.

Primary responsibilities

Claims Consultants are employees of the Society, forming part of the Claims Group and reporting to the Head of Claims. They are senior members of the veterinary profession and this is reflected in their position within the VDS.

The Claims Group comprises the Technical Director (an Executive Board member), the Head of Claims (an Executive Committee member), twelve full time Claims Consultants, the Technical Services (advice service) Manager and fourteen part time Claims Advisers. These personnel work independently, mostly from home, but liaising frequently with each other by telephone and email.

Claims Consultants manage all claims that are made by members against their professional indemnity policies, and have decision-making authority on behalf of the Society to pay compensatory damages and third party costs in civil claims, and/or to instruct and incur the costs of legal representation for members in civil claims or criminal/disciplinary prosecutions.

Professional Indemnity (Civil) Claims

Members notify the Society when they receive a third-party claim for compensation. The Claims Consultant allocated to the claim confirms that the circumstances fall to be covered under the terms of a relevant policy issued by the Society and then takes conduct of the claim against the member. Claims Consultants undertake a thorough and detailed investigation of the facts before reaching a decision on liability. This involves corresponding with the member, other veterinary professionals that are involved, the client/third-party claimant, and where necessary, the instruction of independent experts. The vast majority of third-party claims are either defended or settled by the Claims Consultant through negotiation without recourse to external legal assistance. On occasions third-party claims will proceed to Court where Claims Consultants will assist members with the Court process, attending Court, case conferences, consulting on tactics, and instructing solicitors when required. When external solicitors are instructed to conduct litigation, Claims Consultants remain closely involved with the file and provide expert veterinary opinion to inform tactics as well as providing an important conduit of information between the members involved and the external legal team. Claims Consultants are responsible for assessing the likely financial consequence of all third-party claims notified to the Society and for calculating appropriate financial reserves to be held against each file. Claims Consultants check and authorise payment of legal representatives' fees, negotiate and authorise payment of third party Claimants' costs when necessary, and authorise the settlement of compensatory damages once agreed. The maximum indemnity limit is £10m.

Legal Representation Costs Claims

Members notify the Society when they receive notice of an inquiry or prosecution from the RCVS/VCI or other regulatory body in connection with their veterinary work. The allocated Claims Consultant then liaises with the member and provides support and advice on responding to any such regulatory enquiry. Regulatory enquiries commonly cause significant upset and distress for the member concerned requiring that the Claims Consultant is skilled to manage communications in a sympathetic yet constructive and proactive manner. Claims Consultants will attend interviews with members under investigation and, in the event that a prosecution is threatened, instruct solicitors to assist the Member. When external solicitors are instructed the Claims Consultant remains closely involved with the file, advising on the instruction of experts, the relevant code of conduct, researching and advising on technical veterinary matters, reviewing and contributing to legal drafts and pleadings, supporting the member, and providing an important link between the member and their legal team.

Claims Consultants are not required to have a legal qualification, but must have the capacity and aptitude to acquire and apply legal knowledge relevant to their work.

The provision of rapid responses to requests for advice from member veterinary surgeons or practice support staff is an essential aspect of the Society's service. Telephone calls or email exchanges are frequently time-consuming, and a detailed report of the advice given is circulated through-out the Group to ensure a consistent approach. Claims Consultants work alongside the Claims Adviser team in delivering this service, by direct participation, by support of the Technical Services Manager in his management and supervision of the Claims Advisers, and by the direct mentoring of Claims Advisers when needed.

Claims Consultants are expected to participate in giving presentations on behalf of the Society at various CPD and promotional events. This involvement is not organised according to strict rota, but it is nonetheless an important component of the educational and marketing strategies of the Society.

Claims Consultants register their daily commitments and availability to receive and deal with claims, enquiries and advice calls. They arrange holidays in consultation their colleagues and subject to ultimate approval by the Head of Claims. They take responsibility for delegating cover of their own cases when absent. The workload is inevitably variable. However, it is unrealistic to expect to be able to fulfil the demands of the job in less than 40 hours per week.

The Society provides a standard package of computer hardware and software to allow operation within the VDS communications system. Stationery, telephone, broadband and travelling/subsistence costs are paid by the Society. An administration team located at the Society's offices in Knutsford provides the necessary support.

Person Specification

Criteria	Essential	Desirable
Knowledge, Skills (inc. qualifications)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educated to degree level - BVSc (or equivalent), MRCVS. A high level of current clinical competence is required at the time of appointment. - Critical analytical skills - Negotiating skills - Knowledge of the structure of the veterinary industry and familiarity with current political issues within and affecting the profession - Excellent communication skills, both formal and informal. 	<p>A post-graduate veterinary qualification to certificate or diploma level</p>
Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extensive (minimum 15 years) clinical experience within the relevant species group. - Practice management experience 	<p>Involvement with national or divisional veterinary associations, committees, etc.</p>
Behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The ability to work well within a team-orientated culture, and to be able to give (and receive) constructive comment to (from) colleagues as part of an on-going peer review process, with a view to prioritising consistent excellence in the Claims Group's output. 	
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The ability dispassionately to give good and correct advice to members, whilst at the same time maintaining non-judgmental sympathy and empathy with the personal and distressing circumstances that may be facing them. 	

General responsibilities

- Promotion of the Society's ethos and values
- Fair treatment of members
- Advice and support for members through various media
- Claims management and handling, including representation of members' interests
- Attendance on members as required
- Attendance at meetings as required
- Representation of the Society at meetings, seminars and practices

New appointments to the position of Claims Consultant

Appointed Claims Consultants will serve an initial probationary period of three months, during which time there will be one week's notice either way, since not all potential Consultants will find the job to their liking. During this time the trainees will be required to read all the case papers to familiarise themselves with the nature of claims business and the way in which it is handled by the Group, and to attend Claims Group meetings.

Following successful completion of the probationary period the new consultant enters a structured training period under the close supervision of experienced Claims Consultants acting as mentors. This period lasts for an absolute minimum of three further months.

Informal Discussion

Potential applicants, having read this summary, are welcome to make informal contact to discuss the post with a Claims Consultant on **+44 (0) 1565 652737**. The application form can be obtained via the website (www.thevds.co.uk) or from the HR manager (recruitment@thevds.co.uk).

The Selection Process

Long-listed applicants will be asked to submit responses to written exercises. Short-listed applicants will be invited to interview at Knutsford. Candidates will be assessed by their demonstration of the desired attributes listed below.

General Qualities

- Good verbal and writing skills, including precise, concise and accurate use of written English
- Good communication skills with individuals of differing educational and professional standards
- Dedication and enthusiasm
- High standards of integrity, honesty and fairness
- Problem solving skills using creative and constructive approaches
- Resilience, stamina and reliability when working under pressure
- Commitment to own personal and professional development

Attitude to work

- A non-judgmental approach
- Respect for confidentiality
- Flexibility to meet new demands and to adapt to change
- Claims Group work takes priority at all times
- Sensitivity to others' reactions

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Correspondence and contact with Solicitors or Claimants

- Effective negotiating skills
- A sense of humour
- Mental toughness
- A degree of pragmatism
- The ability to handle hostility appropriately

Contact with other Claims Consultants requires

- Team qualities, including
 - Ability to accept responsibility for the actions of the Group
 - Ability to accept compromise, when necessary
 - Ability to accept majority view, when necessary
 - Ability to maintain a stance, when required
 - Ability to criticise without giving offence
 - Ability to accept criticism with equanimity
- Loyalty
- Self-criticism
- Self-confidence
- Assertiveness
- Approachability
- A network of respectable contacts from within and outwith the profession

Contact with veterinary surgeons and their support staff requires

- Credibility and influence through depth and breadth of expertise
- Respect
- Recognition within the profession
- Decisions to be taken using the appropriate technical or specialist information
- Probity

Working from a remote site requires

- Self-discipline
- Good time management skills
- IT skills
- Self-sufficiency
- Good networking skills
- Ability to maintain an appropriate, mutually helpful, relationship with office staff

Advice Calls require

- Note taking skills or the equivalent
- Patience and the ability to listen
- Tolerance to working pattern being disrupted
- Ability to act decisively having assessed the situation
- Ability to rethink and adapt the advice based on further information
- Ability to divert the caller to a more appropriate source of advice without losing credibility
- Ability to dissect members' draft documents to expose errors, inconsistencies, typos, pitfalls etc
- Ability to differentiate clearly between 'personal' and 'official' advice

The Veterinary Defence Society Limited

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