

FURTHER PARTICULARS

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. Commercial acuity, experience of practice management and familiarity with the regulatory requirements of veterinary practice are also desirable. 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 that consistently prove helpful in the performance of the job. VDS also operates within the financial services sector and is authorised by the FCA, the PRA and the CBI. Candidates must have the ability to understand and implement the regulatory framework.

JOB DESCRIPTION

General responsibilities

- Promotion of the Society's ethos and values
- Management of complaints and claims brought against members in civil, criminal or disciplinary proceedings.
- Represent members' interests through the veterinary, legal and regulatory processes of a claim including at Small Claims Court hearings.
- Provide advice and support for members across veterinary, commercial, legal and regulatory matters.
- Represent VDS in dealings with members and at meetings, seminars and congresses.
- Operate effectively and compliantly within the regulatory and legal environment

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 (usually in Knutsford) and 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 the delivery of the expected performance and outcomes. 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.

This is an employed role sitting within the organisation's Claims Group. 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 video-conference, telephone and e-mail.

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 Liability) 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 are eligible to be covered under the terms of a relevant policy issued by the Society and then assumes 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 litigation process, by consulting and advising on procedure and tactics, running case conferences, attending court (or telephone hearings) to represent the member in some Small Claims track cases and by instructing solicitors when required. When external solicitors are instructed to conduct litigation, Claims Consultants remain closely involved with the file, reviewing and contributing to legal drafts and pleadings, providing expert veterinary opinion to inform tactics and 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 (Criminal and Disciplinary) 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 responsible for assessing the likely financial consequence of all Legal Representation Costs claims notified to the Society and for calculating appropriate financial reserves to be held against each file

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 throughout 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 with 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 fewer than 40 hours per week.

The Society provides all the necessary equipment for home working and there are administration and IT support teams based in the Head Office in Knutsford.

New appointments to the position of Claims Consultant

The appointed Claims Consultant will enter a structured training period under the close supervision of experienced Claims Consultants acting as mentors. There is an initial probationary period of three months, for mutual confirmation that the demands of the position are suited to the trainee. Full time commitment is not required in this phase, but realistically the trainee will need to be able to devote a significant part of a normal working

week to it in order to progress. Following successful completion of the 'probationary period' completion of training will take an absolute minimum of three further months. Thereafter incremental development to full capability in the role can take up to three years and the salary is staged to reflect that.

Remuneration

Subject to experience, a starting salary of £85k per annum is offered (pro-rated to reflect part time commitment in initial training periods), rising by increment to a final salary of £115k per annum once fully trained. An employers' pension contribution of 10% of salary will be paid in addition.

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. 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 and negotiation 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

Correspondence and contact with Solicitors or Claimants

- Effective negotiating skills
- Logical reasoning ability
- 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 give and take constructive feedback
- Loyalty
- Self-criticism
- Self-confidence
- Assertiveness
- Approachability
- A sense of humour
- 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

Person Specification

Criteria	Essential
Knowledge, Skills (including qualifications)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BVSc (or equivalent), MRCVS. • Excellent verbal and written communication skills including the ability to adapt style and approach to match the requirements of different contexts and communication forums. Detailed knowledge of the structure of the veterinary market and familiarity with current issues within and affecting the profession to ensure that the context and environment within which claims are being made is fully understood. • Ability to analyse and understand complex relationships and situations to effectively manage claims cases and stakeholders. • Forensic attention to detail to be able to effectively assess and manage claims, complaints and investigations to a successful outcome, ensuring that the process is rigorously and compliantly followed. • Excellent organisational skills to ensure multiple cases and stakeholders are effectively managed concurrently. • Ability to learn new skills, working disciplines and processes in different environments - the ability to be able to extend beyond proven veterinary skills and knowledge to fulfill the legal and regulatory requirements of the role. This role is ultimately a hybrid role requiring clinical knowledge, knowledge of the veterinary market and environment, experience of how veterinary businesses work, and understanding of legal and regulatory processes and frameworks. Being able to demonstrate and evidence the ability to extend beyond clinical expertise and leadership is essential to manage the hybrid requirements of the role. • Ability to assess and interrogate situations to identify the need for information and evidence and then being resourceful and aware of how and where to gain this to ensure an optimal outcome. • Effective negotiator and influencer at all levels and at both an individual and corporate level as well as an ability to cover clinical, commercial, legal and insurance areas and requirements. • Excellent networking skills in order to maintain relationships and contacts for the ongoing effective management of claims and gaining of up-to-date information and context as well as to remain current within the veterinary profession. • Excellent negotiating skills and commercial acuity.
	Role Specific
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced practitioner or specialist status

Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of clinical expertise and extensive experience (minimum 15 years) spent on the front line delivering clinical veterinary services to the general public • Senior and accountable member of a veterinary business (10 years) to ensure a broad knowledge of the working environment and risks to be able to effectively understand the root cause of claims and complaints and manage them appropriately. This knowledge is as important as the clinical element in order to provide to the member the context and the credibility as an 'expert' and to prove the ability to extend beyond senior clinical experience and leadership. This experience should encompass: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Experience of having to assess situations and to identify requirements to make decisions on different aspects of veterinary business including clinical, commercial, people, practice and business processes and frameworks. ➤ Experience of the management of complaints made against a practice to provide the knowledge of those situations within practice. ➤ Experience of the commercial and financial management and dynamics of a veterinary business ➤ Extensive experience of people management, leading teams, business resourcing, internal culture and communication to provide the context to the environment from which complaints and claims can arise.
	Beneficial
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held office or involved in Committee work in national or regional veterinary organisations • Public speaking and/or teaching experience
Behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-motivated with initiative • Able to work within a team, to provide feedback and updates and to accept consensus when required • Strong emotional intelligence and compassion • Confidence and ability to think on your feet when delivering presentations, training seminars etc. • Empathetic and calm • An ability and willingness to learn from experience and colleagues and to seek and accept assistance and help where needed • Self-disciplined, committed and conscientious • Non-judgmental whilst needing to make judgments
Other	<p>Full time role Home based with the need for travel</p>