



Competition Authority finds room for improvement in competition between vets

The Competition Authority has found that a restriction on advertising by vets and a lack of transparency regarding pricing is restricting competition for consumers.

Launching its report on competition in veterinary services in Ireland, Authority Chairman, Bill Prasifka, said; *"Although recent legislation went a long way towards modernising the profession, there are still a number of changes needed in order for consumers to really benefit from competition. The Competition Authority recommends a number of changes to allow vets greater freedom to compete."*

The Competition Authority makes five recommendations to address competition issues in the veterinary profession (set out in Editor's Notes). The recommendations aim to make it easier for consumers to make informed decisions about veterinary services, encourage vets to offer new and better services, and ensure an adequate supply of veterinary services in Ireland in the long term.

- Vets are restricted from advertising prices and offering discounts. This denies consumers access to basic information about veterinary services in their area, and can also push up prices. The Competition Authority recommends the removal of unnecessary restrictions on advertising and the present ban on actively looking for new business.
- Current legislation does not explicitly allow vets to form companies to run their businesses. This may be denying the benefits of improved access to capital and cost savings, and the ability to provide more flexible locations and working hours, to both vets and consumers. The Competition Authority recommends that vets be explicitly allowed to form companies to run their business affairs.
- The report also found a shift towards pet care and away from farm work. Although there does not appear to be any shortage of vets in practice currently, the Authority recommends that the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food carefully monitor the number of vets providing farm animal care, especially in rural areas.

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- Increasing demand for food animal quality and traceability presents an opportunity for the Department to consider new ways of implementing important veterinary services such as TB testing, and the report recommends the Department consider allowing suitably qualified para-professionals to conduct such tests.

This is the sixth report to be published as part of the Authority's study into competition in the professions in Ireland.

Notes to the Editor

Recommendation 1:

Monitor the number of vets providing food animal services.

Recommendation 2:

Consider the introduction of lay TB testing.

Recommendation 3:

Remove unnecessary restrictions on advertising.

Recommendation 4:

Remove restriction on touting.

Recommendation 5:

Allow corporate bodies to supply veterinary services.

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