



Voluntary Registration and Professional Association Membership: Establishing a New Profession.

Professionalism in veterinary care is about more than technical ability — it's about demonstrating integrity, accountability, and a shared commitment to animal welfare. As musculoskeletal (MSK) Veterinary Allied Health Professionals (VAHPs), your work plays a vital role within the veterinary team, supporting high standards of care and client confidence.

One of the most effective ways to demonstrate that professionalism is by joining a voluntary professional register. It's a proactive step that shows dedication to your role, your clients, and your profession.

How Professions Develop

No profession becomes recognised overnight. According to Bullock et al. (1999), a profession develops when an occupation establishes formal qualifications, training standards, and regulatory structures to admit and discipline members.

Perks (1993) explains that this development usually follows several stages:

- The occupation becomes a full-time career
- Training and university programmes are established
- Professional associations are formed
- Codes of ethics are introduced
- Licensing laws and regulation follow

In the veterinary MSK sector, this professional evolution is already underway. Professional Associations such as NAVP, IRVAP and ACPAT have been in place since the 1980s and voluntary regulation is now in place in the form of the Register of Animal Musculoskeletal Practitioners (RAMP) and Animal Health Professions Register (AHPR), which is the foundation of the last phase of defining a new profession of Veterinary Physiotherapy.

Provision of a voluntary register is the next natural step in this profession's development, and it was acknowledged in 2023 by DEFRA that RAMP is providing this function.

Regulation in the Veterinary Allied Health Context

Regulation protects both the public and the animals under our care. In the UK, some veterinary professions are statutorily regulated — for example, veterinary surgeons and

nurses through the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). MSK allied health roles, currently operate under voluntary regulation.



Statutory Regulation

Statutory regulation is backed by law. Professionals must meet strict educational standards, undertake continuing professional development (CPD), and adhere to a code of conduct. Only those who meet these requirements can use protected professional titles.

Voluntary Regulation

Voluntary regulation, however, is led by the profession itself and joining is a matter of choice.

A strong voluntary register:

- Establishes standards and guidelines
- Defines best practice and ethical conduct
- Evidence accountability and lifelong learning
- Supports development of quality pre-registration education
- Builds public confidence and credibility
- Protects the integrity of the professions

Importantly, as the Veterinary Surgeons Act (VSA) is reviewed and modernised, it is a simplified process for DEFRA to include MSK VAHPs in the reform process if strong, credible systems of voluntary regulation are already in place.

Professional Associations and Regulatory Bodies

Both professional associations and regulatory bodies are vital to the development of a strong and trusted professional community. Though they serve different purposes, together they help define the identity and credibility of a profession.

Regulatory Bodies

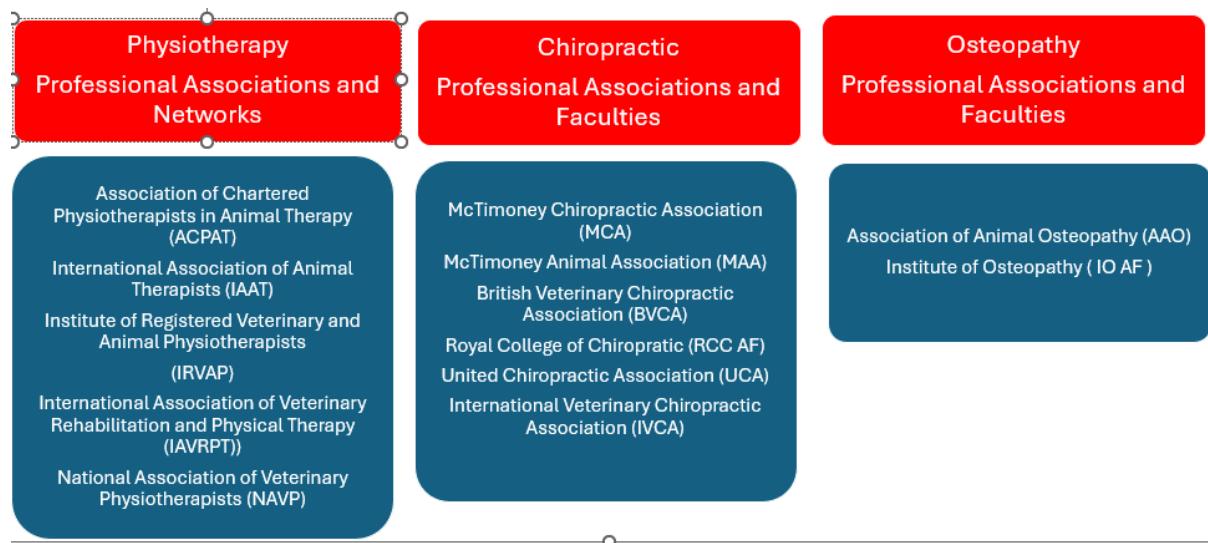
Regulatory bodies, including voluntary registers like RAMP, exist primarily to protect the public and uphold standards. They maintain lists of practitioners who meet verified educational and ethical criteria, oversee compliance with codes of conduct, require ongoing CPD, and provide a complaints process for clients and colleagues.

By joining such a register, VAHPs signal that they belong to a credible, quality-assured professional community that prioritises both animal welfare and public confidence.

Professional Associations

A professional association represents and supports practitioners within a profession. These membership-based organisations exist to:

- Advocate for their members.
- Promote awareness of the role of VAHPs within the veterinary team
- Provide access to education, training, and professional development
- Offer mentoring, networking, and peer support opportunities
- Provide guidance and resources to help members meet professional standards
- Encourage the development and adoption of codes of ethics and best practice



Professional associations also help shape the future of the sector by communicating between members and regulatory bodies.

In short, associations help practitioners develop and grow, while voluntary registers help them demonstrate accountability and public trust. Together, they ensure that VAHP are recognised as credible, ethical, and essential members of the veterinary workforce.

Professional Associations

- Members
- Specific practitioner criteria
- Set standards for their members.
- Represent members
- Provide CPD for their members
- Keep members informed
- Support and mentorship.

Industry Regulatory Bodies

- Registrants
- Set standards for a whole industry.
- Protect the public and their animals.
- Give comfort that registrants are accountable to an independent organisation
- Complete the due diligence to make sure standards are met and maintained.

Building the Future of Musculoskeletal Veterinary Allied Health

Professions advance through accountability and shared standards. By joining a voluntary register like RAMP, MSK VAHPS show leadership and unity, setting a clear example of professional responsibility.

Your professional association membership and regulatory body registration doesn't just strengthen your own career — you help elevate the reputation of your entire industry and contribute to the recognition of VAHPs in future veterinary legislation which will lead to expansion of the veterinary MSK allied health market.

References

- Bullock, A. & Trombley, S. (1999). *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*. London: HarperCollins. p. 689.
- Perks, R.W. (1993). *Accounting and Society*. London: Chapman & Hall. ISBN 0-412-47330-5. p. 2.