

RCVS Day One Competences for Veterinary Nurses

1. This document sets out the minimum essential competences that the RCVS expects all student veterinary nurses to have met when they register, to ensure that they are safe to practise on day one, in whichever area of the profession they start to work.
2. Competence is a concept that integrates knowledge, skills and attitudes, the application of which enables the professional to perform effectively, including being able to cope with contingencies, change, and the unexpected. The RCVS has adopted as a definition of competence in a job “*the ability to perform the roles and tasks required by one’s job to the expected standard*”¹. The standard of competence expected at any given time will “*vary with experience and responsibility and take into account the need to keep up to date with changes in practice*”. Competence is therefore a relative term, and increasing levels of competence will be expected throughout the professional’s career.
3. Defined in this way, there is an important difference between ‘competence’ and ‘skills’. An example of a competence would be “administer nursing care correctly”. This may include a number of associated skills such as assess and record temperature, pulse and respiration, assess levels of consciousness, groom and bathe patients, hand feed patients etc, which would be, in the main, assessed and recorded during the student’s clinical placement as evidence of developing competence. The more generic “competence” requires more than just acquisition of technical skills: it involves applying relevant knowledge, and having the confidence and ability to transfer what has been learnt to a variety of contexts and new unpredictable situations.
4. ‘Day One Competence’ which incorporates the Day One Skills is the minimum standard required for registration as a veterinary nurse with the RCVS and is the starting point for a variety of roles in the veterinary profession. After registration, ongoing professional development will be needed in whichever field the new veterinary nurse decides to enter, and some roles may require further training and qualifications (eg. Specialist theatre nursing, education).
5. A new veterinary nurse who has achieved day one competence should be capable and confident enough to practise veterinary nursing at a primary care level on their own (including simple calculations), under direction from a veterinary surgeon, while knowing when it is appropriate to refer the care to more experienced colleagues. New veterinary nurses are likely to need more time to perform some functions. Support and direction from more senior colleagues should be available.

¹ “Developing the Attributes of Medical Professional Judgement and Competence”, Michael Eraut & Benedict du Boulay, University of Sussex, 2000. www.sussex.ac.uk/Users/bend/doh/reporhtml.html;
www.sussex.ac.uk/Users/bend/doh/

6. Achievement of day one competence is necessary but not sufficient for a student veterinary nurse to qualify for registration to practise in the UK. In addition to day one competence, all student veterinary nurses must, at all times, demonstrate competence in reading and writing the English language in order to be able to cope with the variety of situations they will encounter in veterinary practice,
7. The new veterinary nurse must be fully conversant with and abide by the [RCVS Code of Professional Conduct and its associated guidance](#), covering:
 - professional competence
 - honesty and integrity
 - independence and impartiality
 - client confidentiality and trust
 - professional accountability.

These principles, and compliance with the professional responsibilities set out in the Code, must underpin all their work as veterinary nurses. The latest version of the *Code* and supporting guidance can be found on the RCVS website www.rcvs.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/.

8. The day one competences below are set out under the broad headings of:
 - General professional skills and attributes expected of newly-qualified veterinary nurses
 - Practical and clinical competences expected of new veterinary nurses
9. There are many ways in which these competences can be learnt and assessed, but the RCVS leaves the decisions on the details to universities and awarding organisations, subject to quality monitoring and periodic accreditation visits. Universities and awarding organisations are responsible for developing the Licence to Practise qualification for their students, encompassing a variety of assessment methods (which must include formal reading and writing assessment based on veterinary terminology) and ensuring that they have met the Day One competences by the time they apply to register. They are greatly assisted in this by the RCVS Day One Skills List, which provides the essential practical skills that must be assessed throughout the course of their training.
10. Day one competence may be gained in relation to the care of either horses (or other equidae), large (farm) animals or small animals, which should include dogs, cats and exotic species or all or a combination of the three.

RCVS Day One Competences for Veterinary Nurses

General professional skills and attributes expected of newly qualified veterinary nurses	
Competence	Guidance
1	<p>Be fully conversant with, and follow the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct</p> <p>The RCVS Code of Professional Conduct is available on the RCVS website at www.rcvs.org.uk/vetcode.</p>
2	<p>Understand the ethical and legal responsibilities of the veterinary nurse in relation to patients, clients, society and the environment.</p> <p><i>To abide by the principles in the Code of Professional Conduct, veterinary nurses need to be able to make professional judgements based on sound principles. They must be able to think through the dilemmas they face when presented with conflicting priorities and be prepared to justify the decisions they make.</i></p> <p><i>Veterinary nurses must take account of the possible impact of their actions beyond the immediate workplace, for example, on public health, the environment and society more generally.</i></p> <p><i>Identify ethical issues and participate in the ethical decision making process, applying frameworks and identifying ways of refining the impact of such decisions. Reflect upon the decision making process and help colleagues and clients who wish to raise concerns about ethical issues.</i></p>
3	<p>Demonstrate knowledge of the organisation and legislation related to a veterinary business.</p> <p><i>This includes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>knowing one's own and the employer's responsibilities in relation to employment, financial and health and safety legislation, the position relating to non-veterinary staff, professional and public liability</i> <i>ability to work with various information systems in order to effectively communicate,</i>

		<p><i>share, collect, manipulate and analyse information</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>importance of complying with professional standards, protocols and policies of the business</i> • <i>knowledge of legislation affecting veterinary businesses, such as the disposal of clinical waste and safety of medicines.</i>
4	<p>Promote, monitor and maintain health and safety in the veterinary setting; demonstrate knowledge of systems of quality assurance; apply principles of risk management to their practice.</p>	<p><i>This includes knowledge and explanation of the procedure for reporting adverse incidents and the procedures for avoiding them. It also includes following safe practices relating to the dangers in the workplace.</i></p>
5	<p>Communicate effectively with clients, the public, professional colleagues and responsible authorities, using language appropriate to the audience concerned.</p>	<p><i>Effective communication includes effective listening and responding appropriately, both verbally and non-verbally, depending on the context.</i></p>

Competence		Guidance
6	Prepare accurate clinical and client records, and laboratory reports when necessary, in a form satisfactory to colleagues and understandable by the public.	<i>Patient records should be clear enough to be used by others for reference and (if written by hand) legible, avoiding idiosyncratic abbreviations, language or jargon, so the case can be taken over by another professional for ongoing care if necessary.</i>
7	Work effectively as a member of a multi-disciplinary team in the delivery of services.	<i>The team may include veterinary surgeons, practice managers, technicians, farriers, nutritionists, physiotherapists, veterinary specialists, animal handlers and others. The veterinary nurse should be familiar with and respect the roles played by others in the team and be prepared to provide effective leadership when appropriate.</i>
8	Understand the economic and emotional context in which the veterinary nurse operates.	<i>Veterinary nurses need to be resilient and confident in their own professional judgements to withstand the stresses and conflicting demands they may face in the workplace. They should know how to recognise the signs of stress and how to seek support to mitigate the psychological stress on themselves and others.</i>
9	Be able to review and evaluate literature and presentations critically.	<i>Veterinary nurses must be able to appreciate the difference in value to be attached to different sorts of literature and evidence, for example, recognising commercial and other forms of bias.</i>
10	Understand and apply principles of clinical governance, and practise evidence-based veterinary nursing.	<p><i>More guidance on clinical governance is included in the supporting guidance to the Code of Professional Conduct.</i></p> <p><i>It includes critically analysing the best available evidence for procedures used, reflecting on performance and critical events and learning from the outcome to make changes to one's practice.</i></p>

Competence		Guidance
11	Demonstrate ability to cope with incomplete information, deal with contingencies, and adapt to change.	<i>Veterinary nurses must be able to manage patient care and identify, and deal with, where there is incomplete or unclear data. They need to be able to adapt their care to fit changing circumstances, know how to cope appropriately with contingencies and the unexpected, and identify appropriate options for further care should a patient require it.</i>
12	Demonstrate that they recognise personal and professional limits, and know how to seek professional advice, assistance and support when necessary.	<i>Veterinary nurses must at all stages in their careers be competent in their performance, or be under the close supervision of those more competent until such time as they can act alone under the direction of a veterinary surgeon.</i>
13	Demonstrate a commitment to learning and professional development, both personal and as a member of a profession actively engaged in work-based learning. This includes recording and reflecting on professional experience and taking measures to improve performance and competence.	<i>It is a requirement of the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct that veterinary nurses must maintain and develop their knowledge and skills relevant to their professional practice and competence. This includes being able to reflect, learn, and share information gained with others.</i>

Practical and clinical competences expected of new veterinary nurses

14	<p>Handle and restrain animal patients safely and humanely, and instruct others in helping the veterinary surgeon perform these techniques.</p>	<p><i>Safety applies not only to the animal, but also to others nearby. The new veterinary nurse should be able to make a rapid risk assessment of all procedures as duties are performed, as dangers may appear in situations that initially appear to be safe. They should be prepared to take a range of measures including adaptation, seeking assistance or retreating from the task until safety measures can be put in place.</i></p>
15	<p>Deliver nursing care in accordance with best practice and due regard to animal welfare</p>	<p><i>Complete nursing care is not always required or appropriate in practice. Whilst the new veterinary nurse should be able to complete all care, they should know when it is appropriate to adapt their care to the circumstances.</i></p> <p><i>Administer nursing care to include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>general observation and monitoring</i> ▪ <i>monitoring and management of airways and respiratory function</i> ▪ <i>food and fluid intake</i> ▪ <i>assisted feeding</i> ▪ <i>monitoring and management of gastro-intestinal and urinary function</i> ▪ <i>assessment and monitoring of wounds</i> ▪ <i>management of dressings and bandages</i> ▪ <i>medication management</i> ▪ <i>mobility management and provision of basic physiotherapy</i> ▪ <i>monitoring and assessment of patient thermoregulation</i> ▪ <i>patient stress reduction and mental stimulation</i> <p><i>This list is not exhaustive</i></p>

Competence		Guidance
16	Develop appropriate care plans and administer care in the interests of the patients and with regard to the resources available.	<i>This includes being able to tailor a care plan when there may be financial or other constraints, whilst prioritising the welfare of the patient(s).</i>
17	Administer emergency first aid and assist with the provision of emergency treatment to animals	<i>The new veterinary nurse must be able to perform basic first aid, and know when and how to call for assistance from others if called to deal with an animal outside their immediate area of competence or where there are potential risks to health and safety. This involves being able to make a rapid risk assessment of the situation and taking appropriate action to protect the health and safety of themselves and those around them.</i>
19	Collect, preserve and transport samples, prepare appropriate diagnostic tests, understand the limitations of the test results and identify the significance of spurious results	<i>New veterinary nurses are expected to have a working knowledge of relevant tests for the condition under investigation. They should seek assistance to interpret results prior to reporting to the veterinary surgeon</i>
20	Communicate clearly and collaborate with referral and diagnostic services, ensuring they receive an appropriate history from the veterinary surgeon.	

Competence		Guidance
21	Prepare and conduct diagnostic imaging and other techniques carrying out the procedure in accordance with good health and safety and current regulations.	<i>This competence includes taking images of diagnostically-useful quality, as well as the safe use of the equipment (eg ionising radiation regulations) in accordance with best practice ('ALARA' principle – as low as reasonably achievable). 'Basic' equipment includes, for example, x-ray, ultrasound and endoscopes, but a new veterinary nurse would not be expected to perform an MRI or CT scan.</i>
22	Recognise suspicious signs of possible notifiable, reportable and zoonotic diseases and take appropriate action, including observing the appropriate health and safety recommendations.	<i>This involves identifying the clinical signs, clinical course, transmission potential (including vectors) of pathogens associated with common zoonotic and food-borne diseases and transboundary animal diseases.</i>
23	Access the appropriate sources of data on licensed medicines.	
24	Dispense medicines correctly and responsibly in accordance with veterinary surgeon direction, legislation and latest guidance.	<i>New veterinary nurses must be aware of health and safety issues so that he/she is able to inform clients appropriately. When using or dispensing antimicrobial agents, veterinary nurses must be aware of the risk of antimicrobial resistance.</i>
25	Be aware of suspected adverse reactions and alert the veterinary surgeon.	<i>The veterinary nurse should be aware of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate procedures for reporting.</i>

Competence		Guidance
26	Apply principles of bio-security correctly, including sterilisation of equipment and disinfection of clothing.	<i>This applies to all areas of veterinary practice. All veterinary nurses must maintain high standards of biosecurity at all times in order to minimise the risk of contamination, cross-infection and accumulation of pathogens in the veterinary premises and in the wider environment.</i>
27	Prepare the environment, equipment and patient for aseptic surgery.	<i>The new veterinary nurse must appreciate the requirement for asepsis during procedures.</i>
28	Assist the veterinary surgeon as a scrubbed nurse to perform surgical procedures on patients	<i>This includes providing assistance whilst in theatre and when scrubbed up and also the handling of equipment and materials in a sterile manner during surgical procedures.</i>
29	Assist the veterinary surgeon by preparing patients, equipment and materials for anaesthetic procedures	
30	Assist in administering and maintaining anaesthetics to patients.	<i>This includes the maintaining and monitoring of anaesthesia under supervision during veterinary procedures</i>
31	Assess pain and alert the veterinary surgeon.	<i>The new veterinary nurse should be able to score and evaluate pain.</i>
32	Understand the appropriate need for euthanasia; sensitively support the owner and others with due regard for health and safety of those present; advise on disposal of the carcass.	
33	Advise clients on programmes of preventative medicine appropriate to species	<i>New veterinary nurses will need to be able to assess health and welfare records in order to provide appropriate advice.</i>