

RCVS Day One Competences

1. This document sets out the minimum essential competences that the RCVS expects all veterinary students to have met when they graduate, 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 “perform aseptic surgery correctly”. This may include a number of associated skills such as scrubbing up, excising small tumours and cysts, routine castration, suturing etc, which would be recorded in the student’s experience log 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’ is the minimum standard required for registration with the RCVS and is the starting point for a variety of roles in the veterinary profession. After graduation, ongoing professional development will be needed in whichever field the new graduate decides to enter, and some roles may require postgraduate training and further qualifications (eg. pathology, government regulatory work, specialist clinical practice).
5. All new graduates in clinical practice should continue their development throughout the Professional Development Phase (PDP) until they reach ‘Year One Competence’. Beyond this, they may wish to take postgraduate certificates, and seek accreditation as an RCVS Advanced Practitioner to demonstrate mastery in their field of interest. Those who want to specialise later in their careers will need to aim for a European Diploma to be accredited as RCVS and European Specialists.

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. **A new graduate who has achieved day one competence should be capable and confident enough to practise veterinary medicine at a primary care level on their own, while knowing when it is appropriate to seek direction from more experienced colleagues. New graduates are likely to need more time to perform some procedures. Support and direction from more senior colleagues should be available.** The amount of support and assistance needed by a new graduate should tail off over time, as they continue their development throughout the Professional Development Phase and work towards their ‘year one competence’. The measure for achievement of ‘year one competence’ is that they are “*able to perform a range of common clinical procedures, or manage them without close supervision, in a reasonable period of time and with a high probability of a successful outcome*”².
7. Achievement of day one competence is necessary but not sufficient for a graduate to qualify for registration to practise in the UK. In addition to day one competence, all new graduates will have acquired a range of graduate-level attributes during their university degree course. These attributes include academic and professional capabilities as befits the award of a professional qualification at Masters³ level of the national qualifications framework. Benchmarks for this are set in the UK by the Quality Assurance Agency which oversees standards in UK universities.
8. The new veterinary graduate 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 surgeons. The latest version of the *Code* and supporting guidance can be found on the RCVS website www.rcvs.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/.

9. The day one competences below are set out under the broad headings of:
- General professional skills and attributes expected of newly-qualified veterinary surgeons
 - Practical and clinical competences expected of new veterinary surgeons
 - Underpinning knowledge and understanding

This last section is an indicator of the extent of knowledge, but of course can never be a fully comprehensive list.

² “Guidance on the Professional Development Phase”, RCVS, August 2012

³ The Quality Assurance Agency sets the level descriptors and benchmarks for higher education qualifications in the UK. Masters degrees are placed at level 7 in the framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and at level 11 in the framework for Scotland. This equates to the European ‘Bologna’ framework for higher education, where Masters degrees are placed within the ‘second cycle’ of higher education. Details of the framework of levels can be found on the QAA website, www.qaa.ac.uk and at www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/qualifications/Pages/default.aspx

10. There are many ways in which these competences can be learnt and assessed, but the RCVS leaves the decisions on the details to universities, subject to periodic accreditation visits. Universities are responsible for developing the day one competence of their students and ensuring that they have met the competences by the time they graduate. They are greatly assisted in this by the practising arm of the veterinary profession, which provides extra-mural work placements so that students can practise applying these competences in the workplace.

11. The RCVS has developed an online Student Experience Log (SEL), which includes a list of procedures and skills that students may cover during their degree course, both in intra-mural rotations in university clinics, and also in extra-mural placements⁴. The skills in the SEL are not all day one skills – some may go beyond what might be expected at day one – but the SEL can be used by the student to keep a record of the practical and clinical skills they have covered in order to guide their learning. The SEL can be used by UK universities to judge whether a student has gained a good balance of experience before they graduate.

⁴ The SEL is one component of the RCVS Professional Development Record (PDR). After registering with the RCVS, new graduates progress to the PDP component of the PDR to record their year one competence. The CPD component of the PDR can be used by all members of RCVS to record their ongoing professional development plans and achievements.

RCVS Day One Competences

General professional skills and attributes expected of newly qualified veterinary surgeons		
	Competence	Guidance
1	Be fully conversant with, and follow the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct	See www.rcvs.org.uk/vetcode .
2	Understand the ethical and legal responsibilities of the veterinary surgeon in relation to patients, clients, society and the environment.	<p><i>To abide by the principles in the Code of Professional Conduct, veterinary surgeons 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>As well as decisions relating to individual patients, animal groups, populations of animals and clients, veterinary surgeons must take account of the possible impact of their actions beyond the immediate workplace, eg, on public health, the environment and society more generally.</i></p>
3	Demonstrate knowledge of the organisation, management and legislation related to a veterinary business.	<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, and professional and public liability</i> • <i>awareness of how fees are calculated, of income, overheads and other expenditure involved in running a veterinary business</i> • <i>ability to work with various information systems to effectively communicate, share, collect, manipulate and analyse information</i> • <i>importance of complying with professional standards, protocols & policies of the business</i> • <i>knowledge of legislation affecting veterinary businesses, such as the disposal of clinical waste and safety of medicines.</i>

Competence		Guidance
4	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.	<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>
5	Communicate effectively with clients, the public, professional colleagues and responsible authorities, using language appropriate to the audience concerned.	<i>Effective communication includes effective listening and responding appropriately, both verbally and non-verbally, depending on the context.</i>
6	Prepare accurate clinical and client records, and case reports when necessary, in a form satisfactory to colleagues and understandable by the public.	<i>Patient records should be clear enough that they can be referred to by others and (if written by hand) legible, avoiding idiosyncratic abbreviations or jargon, so the case can be taken over by another professional for ongoing treatment 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 nurses, practice managers, technicians, farriers, nutritionists, physiotherapists, veterinary specialists, meat hygiene inspectors, animal handlers and others. The veterinary surgeon 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 surgeon operates.	<i>Veterinary surgeons 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>New graduates 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>

Competence		Guidance
10	Understand and apply principles of clinical governance, and practise evidence-based veterinary medicine.	<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>
11	Use their professional capabilities to contribute to the advancement of veterinary knowledge, in order to improve the quality of animal care and public health.	<p><i>The veterinary surgeon must think beyond the immediate case in hand, and take up opportunities to contribute to the processes of continuous improvement. This may include clinical audit, case discussions, research and adding to the evidence base for others to draw on in the future.</i></p>
12	Demonstrate ability to cope with incomplete information, deal with contingencies, and adapt to change.	<p><i>Veterinary surgeons must be able to manage cases and make decisions where there is incomplete or unclear data. It is not always possible to run a full set of tests or range of diagnostic procedures which may preclude the investigation of the 'perfect' case. They need to be able to adapt their approach to fit changing circumstances, know how to cope appropriately with contingencies and the unexpected, and identify appropriate options for further diagnosis, treatment and/or referral, should a case require it.</i></p>
13	Demonstrate that they recognise personal and professional limits, and know how to seek professional advice, assistance and support when necessary.	<p><i>Veterinary surgeons undertaking procedures on patients must at all stages in their careers be competent in their performance, or be under the close supervision of those so competent until such time as they can act alone.</i></p>

Competence		Guidance
14	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 surgeons must maintain and develop their knowledge and skills relevant to their professional practice and competence. New graduates must be prepared to take part in the RCVS Professional Development Phase (PDP) and be ready on graduation to make the transition to being an independent learner responsible for their own professional improvement and development. This includes being able to reflect, learn, and share information gained with others.</i>
15	Take part in self-audit and peer-group review processes in order to improve performance.	<i>Veterinary surgeons must regularly review how they are performing in their day to day professional work, and play an active part in performance appraisal. New graduates in clinical practice must take part in the RCVS Professional Development Phase and keep a record of their continuing progress until they have met the year one competence level.</i>

Practical and clinical competences expected of new veterinary surgeons

16	Obtain an accurate and relevant history of the individual animal or animal group, and its/their environment	
17	Handle and restrain animal patients safely and humanely, and instruct others in helping the veterinary surgeon perform these techniques.	<i>Safety applies not only to the animal, but also to others nearby. The new veterinary surgeon 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>
18	Perform a complete clinical examination	<i>A complete clinical examination is not always required or appropriate in practice. Whilst the new veterinary surgeon should be able to perform a complete examination, they should know when it is appropriate to adapt their examination to the circumstances.</i>
19	Develop appropriate treatment plans and administer treatment in the interests of the patients and with regard to the resources available.	<i>This includes being able to tailor a treatment plan when there may be financial or other constraints, whilst prioritising the welfare of the patient(s), whether for an individual animal or the group.</i>
20	Attend all species in an emergency and perform first aid.	<i>The new graduate 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>

Competence		Guidance
21	Assess the physical condition, welfare and nutritional status of an animal or group of animals and advise the client on principles of husbandry and feeding.	<i>This applies to commonly presented cases and would not be expected to include advanced advice for complex cases.</i>
22	Collect, preserve and transport samples, select appropriate diagnostic tests, interpret and understand the limitations of the test results.	<i>New graduates are expected to have a working knowledge of relevant tests for the condition under investigation. They should seek assistance to interpret results when appropriate.</i>
23	Communicate clearly and collaborate with referral and diagnostic services, including providing an appropriate history.	
24	Understand the contribution that imaging and other diagnostic techniques can make in achieving a diagnosis. Use basic imaging equipment and carry out an examination effectively as appropriate to the case, in accordance with good health and safety practice 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 graduate would not be expected to perform an MRI or CT scan. New graduates should be able to interpret common findings and know when to refer or seek more experienced interpretation if appropriate.</i>
25	Recognise suspicious signs of possible notifiable, reportable and zoonotic diseases and take appropriate action, including notifying the relevant authorities.	<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>
26	Apply the RCVS Twelve Principles of Certification.	<i>The Principles of Certification are described in the supporting guidance to the Code of Professional Conduct, available on the RCVS website. New graduates must be familiar with the Principles and follow the RCVS supporting guidance.</i>

Competence		Guidance
27	Access the appropriate sources of data on licensed medicines.	
28	Prescribe and dispense medicines correctly and responsibly in accordance with legislation and latest guidance.	<i>New graduates must understand the requirements of the Cascade in prescribing. In particular, when prescribing or using antimicrobial agents, care must be taken to minimise the risk of antimicrobial resistance.</i>
29	Report suspected adverse reactions.	<i>The veterinary surgeon should follow the Veterinary Medicines Directorate procedures for reporting.</i>
30	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 surgeons 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 field.</i>
31	Perform aseptic surgery correctly.	<i>The new graduate must appreciate the requirement for asepsis during procedures, and be able to perform simple, elective surgeries within the limitations of their experience, in an aseptic fashion.</i>
32	Safely perform sedation, and general and regional anaesthesia; implement chemical methods of restraint.	
33	Assess and manage pain.	<i>The new graduate should be able to score and evaluate pain.</i>
34	Recognise when euthanasia is appropriate and perform it humanely, using an appropriate method, whilst showing sensitivity to the feelings of owners and others, with due regard to the safety of those present; advise on disposal of the carcass.	

Competence		Guidance
35	Perform a systematic gross post-mortem examination, record observations, sample tissues, store and transport them.	<i>The new graduate should be aware of the limitations of such investigations, and the potential for conflict of interest where the veterinary surgeon has previously been involved with the case. It is important that they are able to differentiate between normal and abnormal, and that good quality records and samples are taken for further investigation by a pathologist if necessary.</i>
36	Perform ante-mortem inspection of animals destined for the food-chain, including paying attention to welfare aspects; correctly identify conditions affecting the quality and safety of products of animal origin, to exclude those animals whose condition means their products are unsuitable for the food-chain.	<i>Not all graduates will work in food-animal practice, but the ability to undertake a health and welfare assessment is an important competence, and is required of all new graduates to comply with European and OIE international recognition requirements. Further postgraduate training will be needed before the new graduate can take up official veterinarian duties.</i>
37	Advise on, and implement, preventative programmes appropriate to the species and in line with accepted animal health, welfare and public health standards.	<i>New graduates will need to be able to assess health and welfare records (and production records where appropriate) and implement health plans. This does not only apply to production animals but is important for any kept animals, particularly those kept in groups.</i>

Underpinning knowledge and understanding

In order to be able to undertake their professional duties effectively, new veterinary graduates will need a breadth of underpinning knowledge and understanding of the biological, animal and social sciences and laws related to the animal industries. This will include, but is not restricted to, the following:

- Understanding of, and competence in, the logical approaches to both scientific and clinical reasoning, the distinction between the two, and the strengths and limitations of each.
- Research methods and the contribution of basic and applied research to veterinary science.
- The structure, function and behaviour of animals and their physiological and welfare needs, including healthy domestic animals, captive wildlife and laboratory-housed animals.
- A knowledge of the businesses related to animal breeding, production and keeping.
- The aetiology, pathogenesis, clinical signs, diagnosis and treatment of the common diseases and disorders that occur in the common domestic species in the UK.
- Awareness of other diseases of international importance that pose a risk to national and international biosecurity.
- Legislation relating to animal care and welfare, animal movement, and notifiable and reportable diseases.
- Medicines legislation and guidelines on responsible use of medicines, including responsible use of antimicrobials and anthelmintics.
- The principles of disease prevention and the promotion of health and welfare.
- Veterinary public health issues, including epidemiology, transboundary epizootic diseases, zoonotic and food-borne diseases, emerging and re-emerging diseases, food hygiene and technology.
- Principles of effective interpersonal interaction, including communication, leadership, management and team working.
- The ethical framework within which veterinary surgeons should work, including important ethical theories that inform decision-making in professional and animal welfare-related ethics.