

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 standard of competence expected at any given time will depend upon the individual's level of experience and responsibility in a continuous way. 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, in the main, be 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 newly registered veterinary nurse decides to enter, and some roles may require further training and qualifications (eg. Specialist theatre nursing, education).
5. A newly registered 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. Newly registered veterinary nurses are likely to need more time to perform some functions. Support and direction from more senior colleagues should be available.

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 newly registered 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 registered veterinary nurses
 - Practical and clinical competences expected of newly registered 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) or small animals, which should include dogs, cats and exotic species or all or a combination of the three.

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General professional skills and attributes expected of newly registered veterinary nurses	
Competence	Guidance
1	<p>Be fully conversant with, and adhere to the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct</p> <p><i>The RCVS Code of Professional Conduct is available on the RCVS website.</i></p>
2	<p>Understand the professional, ethical and legal responsibilities of the veterinary nurse in relation to patients, clients, the veterinary team, society, and the environment.</p> <p><i>To abide by the principles in the Code of Professional Conduct, newly registered 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>Newly registered 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.</i></p>

		<i>Reflect upon the decision-making process and help colleagues and clients who wish to raise concerns about ethical issues.</i>
3	Demonstrate knowledge of the organisation 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, safeguarding, 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, share, collect, manipulate, and analyse information</i> <i>• understand the importance of complying with professional standards, protocols, and policies of the business</i> <i>• knowledge of legislation affecting veterinary businesses.</i>
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. Newly registered veterinary nurses are expected to have a knowledge and understanding of Quality Improvement and clinical auditing procedures and be able to suggest improvements to their practice.</i>
5	Communicate effectively with clients, the public, professional colleagues, and responsible authorities, using language appropriate to the audience concerned.	<i>Effective communication, including both verbal and non-verbal communication, includes active listening and responding appropriately, and utilising the appropriate tone. depending on the context.</i>
6	Ensure informed consent is obtained.	<i>Informed consent, which is an essential part of any contract, can only be given by a client who has had the opportunity to consider a range of reasonable treatment options (including euthanasia), with associated fee estimates, and had the significance and main risks explained to them.</i>

Competence		Guidance
7	Prepare accurate clinical and client records, and laboratory reports, when necessary, in a format 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>
8	Work effectively as a member of a multi-disciplinary team in the delivery of services.	<i>The newly registered veterinary nurse should be familiar with and respect the roles and responsibilities of others in the team and be prepared to provide effective leadership when appropriate.</i>
9	Understand the requirements of Schedule 3 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 with respect to delegation	<i>The newly registered nurse should have a full understanding of the key considerations when accepting delegated activities from veterinary surgeons or veterinary nurses.</i>
10	Understand the economic and social context in which the veterinary nurse operates.	<i>Newly registered veterinary nurses need to appreciate the varying economic status and socio-cultural background of clients.</i>
11	Understand and demonstrate the ability to reflect on the emotional landscape of the veterinary nursing profession.	<i>Newly registered veterinary nurses should be able to demonstrate an awareness of the psychological context of their work. They should have an understanding of how emotional factors may impact on, and present in, themselves, their colleagues and clients. They should know how to recognise the signs of stress and how, and where, to seek support to mitigate psychological stress on themselves and others.</i>

12	Be able to review and evaluate literature, current evidence-based research, and presentations critically.	<i>Newly registered 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, and ensuring that the literature that informs their decision making is current and reliable.</i>
13	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 current evidence for procedures used, reflecting on performance and critical events, and learning from the outcome to make changes to one's practice. Veterinary nurses are encouraged, and should be empowered, to publish research findings.</i></p>

Competence		Guidance
14	Have developed the clinical judgement to cope with incomplete information, develop contingencies and adapt to change.	<i>Newly registered veterinary nurses must be able to manage patient care and identify and develop a dynamic clinical plan, where there is incomplete or unclear data. They need to be able to consult with the veterinary surgeons and veterinary professionals, be adaptable and dynamic, and adapt their care to fit changing circumstances. Newly registered veterinary nurses should use knowledge and understanding and reflect on evidence-based nursing and adapt to the unexpected and identify appropriate options for further care should a patient require it.</i>
15	Demonstrate that they recognise, and work within, personal and professional limits, and know how to seek professional advice, assistance, and support when necessary.	<i>Newly registered 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>
16	Demonstrate a commitment to lifelong 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, both in the academic and practice setting, and taking measures to improve performance, competence and confidence.	<i>It is a requirement of the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct that registered veterinary nurses must maintain and develop their knowledge and skills relevant to their professional practice, competence and confidence. This includes being able to reflect, learn, and share information gained with others.</i>

Practical and clinical competences expected of newly registered veterinary nurses		
17	Handle and restrain patients safely, effectively, and humanely, and instruct others in helping the veterinary team perform these techniques, with due consideration of patient needs and behaviours.	<p><i>Safety applies not only to the patient and handler, but also to others nearby. The newly registered 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, appropriate personal and patient protective equipment, seeking assistance or retreating from the task until safety measures can be put in place.</i></p> <p><i>The newly registered veterinary nurse should be able to handle and restrain a wide range of species, according to practice case load (for small animal - ideally, including exotics and wildlife).</i></p>
18	Deliver holistic nursing care in accordance with best practice and due regard to animal welfare	<p><i>Complete nursing care is not always required or appropriate in practice. Whilst the newly registered 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 in accordance with the RCVS Day One Skills for Veterinary Nurses</i></p> <p><i>The newly registered veterinary nurse should have the knowledge and understanding of developing a care plan and care bundles for a diverse range of patients according to the practice case load (small animal – ideally, including exotics and wildlife.)</i></p>

Competence		Guidance
19	Plan and administer appropriate care in the interests of patient welfare and with regard to the resources available.	<i>This includes being able to tailor patient specific care when there may be financial or other constraints whilst prioritising the welfare of the patient(s) and in consultation with the veterinary team.</i>
20	Administer emergency first aid and assist with the provision of emergency treatment to patients	<i>The newly registered veterinary nurse must be able to perform initial first aid and know when and how to call for assistance from others 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 in accordance with practice policy.</i>
21	Collect, preserve, and prepare samples for safe transportation, prepare appropriate diagnostic tests, understand the limitations of the test results and identify the significance of spurious results	<i>Newly registered veterinary nurses are expected to have a working knowledge of relevant tests for the condition under investigation. They should seek assistance, where required, to interpret results prior to reporting to the veterinary surgeon.</i>
22	Communicate clearly and concisely and collaborate with referral and diagnostic services, ensuring they receive an appropriate history from the veterinary team.	<i>Newly registered veterinary nurses must ensure this is conducted in accordance with relevant data protection legislation.</i>

Competence		Guidance
23	Understand how to prepare and conduct diagnostic and other imaging techniques carrying out the procedure in accordance with health and safety and current regulations.	<i>This competence includes how to take images of diagnostic quality, as well as setting up the equipment safely (eg ionising radiation regulations) in accordance with best practice ('ALARA' principle – as low as reasonably achievable). 'Different modalities should include, for example, radiography, ultrasound and endoscopes, but a newly registered veterinary nurse would not be expected to perform an MRI or CT scan.</i>
24	Recognise signs of possible notifiable, reportable, and zoonotic diseases and understand the appropriate action to be taken, 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>
25	Access the appropriate and reliable sources of data on licensed medicines.	<i>This competence includes the appropriate use of relevant and reliable Compendiums and the VMD website.</i>
26	Dispense medicines correctly and responsibly in accordance with veterinary surgeon direction, legislation, and current guidance.	<p><i>Newly registered veterinary nurses must be aware of health and safety issues so that they are able to inform clients appropriately.</i></p> <p><i>When using or dispensing antimicrobial agents, veterinary nurses must be aware of the risk of antimicrobial resistance.</i></p> <p><i>The newly registered veterinary nurse must have some knowledge and understanding of the prescribing cascade.</i></p>

27	Be aware of possible side effects and adverse reactions to medications and alert the veterinary surgeon.	<i>The newly registered veterinary nurse should be aware of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate procedures for reporting.</i>
28	Be aware of common poisons and toxic substances	<i>The newly registered veterinary nurse should be aware of how to access the Veterinary Poisons Information Service and understand nursing care and management interventions.</i>

Competence		Guidance
29	Identify risk and apply principles of biosecurity correctly, including sterilisation and disinfection of equipment and 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>
30	Understand how to prepare the environment, equipment, and patient for surgery.	<i>The newly registered veterinary nurse must appreciate the requirement for asepsis during procedures.</i>
31	Understand how to appropriately 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>
32	Understand how to assist the veterinary surgeon by preparing patients, equipment, and materials for anaesthetic procedures.	<i>No guidance.</i>
33	Understand how to assist in administering and maintaining anaesthetics to patients.	<i>This includes the maintaining and monitoring of anaesthesia under supervision during veterinary procedures.</i>
34	Identify, assess, and evaluate pain and alert the veterinary surgeon accordingly.	<i>The newly registered veterinary nurse should be able to score and evaluate pain, using a validated or evidence-based protocol, in a manner relevant to the species.</i>

35	Be cognisant of behavioural changes of patients.	<i>The newly registered veterinary nurse should be able to recognise changes to patient behaviour and have an appreciation of contributory factors.</i>
36	Understand the appropriate need for euthanasia; sensitively support the owner and others with due regard for health and safety of those present; sympathetically advise on the disposal of the patient.	<i>No guidance.</i>
37	Advise clients on programmes of health and welfare, to include preventative medicine, appropriate to species and life stage and in accordance with legal requirements.	<i>Newly registered veterinary nurses will need to be able to assess clinical records and perform clinical examinations in order to provide appropriate advice.</i>