

ESSENTIAL COMPETENCES REQUIRED OF THE VETERINARY SURGEON

INTRODUCTION

1. An important statutory function of RCVS is to determine the “standard of proficiency” and “knowledge and skill” to fit veterinary surgeons for practising in the United Kingdom. The standard set for registration is a key benchmark that affects the approval of veterinary degree courses in the UK and overseas, and should also be seen as the starting point for consideration of an individual’s continuing education and training needs after registration. Maintaining and further developing professional competence is a requirement for all veterinary surgeons.
2. This document sets out the essential competences required of the veterinary surgeon for membership of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. It does this in two parts:
 - essential competences required at graduation – the “day one skills”
 - essential competences required after approximately one year of further professional training within a defined area of practice – the “year one skills”. The “year one skills” form the basis of the Professional Development Phase (PDP), which graduates are expected to follow when they first start practising as qualified veterinary surgeons.
3. There are many definitions of ‘competence’ and many views on how it can be developed and assessed. In general terms, however, competence is a concept that integrates knowledge, skills and attitudes, the application of which enables the professional to perform effectively, and to respond to contingencies, change, and the unexpected.
4. This document takes a broad definition of competence as being **“the ability to perform the roles and tasks required by one’s job to the expected standard”** (Eraut & Boulay, 2000¹). The advantage of this definition is that it recognises that requirements and expectations change depending on job role and context. It also recognises that competence develops, and that an individual may work ‘competently’ at many different levels, either at different stages of their career, or indeed from one day to the next depending on the nature of their work.
5. It is important to distinguish between an individual’s *competence* – what one can do, and *performance* – what one actually does. RCVS is concerned with **competence** when it undertakes its primary function of determining “the standard of proficiency required for registration” and ensuring that individuals “will have acquired the knowledge and skill needed for the efficient practice of veterinary surgery” (Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, section 3). Performance may be affected by factors such as workload, working conditions, levels of support, and so on. The regulation of **performance** is a function of RCVS through its statutory disciplinary powers.

¹ “Developing the Attributes of Medical Professional Judgement and Competence”, a review funded by the Postregistration Medical and Dental Education Research Initiative of the Dept. of Health’s Policy Research Programme, by Professor Michael Eraut and Benedict du Boulay, University of Sussex. The full paper is available on the web at <http://www.cogs.susx.ac.uk/users/bend/doh>

6. The essential competences have been broken down into three main areas, and these are reflected in both the “day one” and the “year one” requirements. They are:

- **A General professional competences and attributes**
describing the distinguishing characteristics of a veterinary surgeon
- **B Underpinning knowledge and understanding**
describing in general terms the breadth of knowledge and understanding needed for a career as a veterinary surgeon, and for subsequent professional development in whatever sphere of veterinary science the individual wishes to pursue
- **C Practically-based veterinary competences**
describing the basic practical competences that are expected a) at the point of graduation, and b) following an extended period of further professional training in practice.

The ten guiding principles of the RCVS Guide to Professional Conduct should be seen as overarching requirements for registration (and by implication, continued registration) with the College. The Guide states that:

Your clients are entitled to expect that you will: -

1. make animal welfare your first consideration in seeking to provide the most appropriate attention for animals committed to your care
2. ensure that all animals under your care are treated humanely and with respect
3. maintain and continue to develop your professional knowledge and skills
4. foster and maintain a good relationship with your clients, earning their trust, respecting their views and protecting client confidentiality
5. uphold the good reputation of the veterinary profession
6. ensure the integrity of veterinary certification
7. foster and endeavour to maintain good relationships with your professional colleagues
8. understand and comply with your legal obligations in relation to the prescription, safe-keeping and supply of veterinary medicinal products
9. familiarise yourself with and observe the relevant legislation in relation to veterinary surgeons as individual members of the profession, employers, employees and business owners
10. respond promptly, fully and courteously to complaints and criticism.

ESSENTIAL COMPETENCES REQUIRED OF THE NEW VETERINARY GRADUATE

THE 'DAY ONE' COMPETENCES

A1 - GENERAL PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

The new veterinary graduate should be able to:

- A1.1 Communicate effectively with clients, the lay public, professional colleagues and responsible authorities; listen effectively and respond sympathetically to clients and others, using language in a form appropriate to the audience and the context
- A1.2 Prepare clear case reports and maintain patient records in a form satisfactory to colleagues and understandable by the public
- A1.3 Work effectively as a member of a multi-disciplinary team in the delivery of services to clients
- A1.4 Be aware of the ethical responsibilities of the veterinary surgeon in relation to individual patient care and client relations, and also more generally in the community in relation to their possible impact on the environment and society as a whole
- A1.5 Be aware of the economic and emotional climate in which the veterinary surgeon operates, and respond appropriately to the influence of such pressures
- A1.6 Be willing to use one's professional capabilities to contribute as far as possible to the advancement of veterinary knowledge in order to benefit veterinary practice and further improve the quality of animal care and public health
- A1.7 Have an elementary knowledge of the organisation and management of a veterinary practice, including:
 - awareness of own and employer's responsibilities in relation to employment and health and safety legislation, and the position relating to lay staff and public liability
 - awareness of how fees are calculated and invoices drawn up, and the importance of following the practice's systems for record keeping and book-keeping, including computer records and case reports
 - ability to use information technology effectively to communicate, share, collect, manipulate and analyse information
 - importance of complying with professional standards and policies of the practice
- A1.8 Understand the need and professional obligation for a commitment to continuing education and training, and professional development, throughout one's professional life

A1.9 Conduct oneself in a professional manner with regard to the veterinary surgeon's professional and legal responsibilities and understand and apply the ethical codes as set out in the RCVS Guide to Professional Conduct

A1.10 Be able to cope with uncertainty and adapt to change

A1.11 Develop a capacity for self-audit and willingness to participate in the peer-review process

A1.12 Be aware of personal limitations, and demonstrate awareness of when and from where to seek professional advice, assistance and support.

(Commentary: This last item is considered to be one of the most important, and should guide all new veterinary graduates when undertaking their professional duties. Veterinary surgeons undertaking procedures on patients must at all stages in their careers be fully competent in their performance, or be under the close supervision of those so competent. When in doubt, the new veterinary graduate must seek professional support and in the interests of animal and human health, should not attempt to undertake complex procedures unsupervised.)

B1 - UNDERPINNING KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

The new veterinary graduate will need to have acquired a thorough knowledge and understanding of the following:

- B1.1 The sciences on which the activities of veterinary surgeons are based
- B1.2 Research methods and the contribution of basic and applied research to all aspects of veterinary science
- B1.3 How to evaluate evidence
- B1.4 The structure and functions of healthy animals, and all aspects of their husbandry
- B1.5 The aetiology, pathogenesis, clinical signs, diagnosis and treatment of the common diseases and disorders that occur in the common domestic species in the UK
- B1.6 Legislation relating to the welfare (including transport) of animals and notifiable diseases
- B1.7 Medicines legislation and guidelines on responsible use of medicines
- B1.8 The principles of disease prevention and the promotion of health and welfare
- B1.9 Veterinary public health issues including zoonoses.

C1 - PRACTICAL COMPETENCES

The new veterinary graduate should be able to undertake the following:

- C1.1 Obtain an accurate and relevant history of the individual animal or animal group, and its/their environment
- C1.2 Handle and restrain an animal safely and humanely, and instruct others in performing these techniques

C1.3 Perform a complete clinical examination

C1.4 Attend all species in an emergency and perform basic first aid

(Commentary: problems to be handled for any species include first aid management of haemorrhage, wounds, breathing difficulties, eye & ear injuries, unconsciousness, clinical deterioration, burns, tissue damage, internal organ damage and cardiac arrest. First aid to be applied includes bandaging, cleaning, immobilising limbs, resuscitation procedures, haemorrhage control.)

C1.5 Assess correctly the nutritional status of an animal and be able to advise the client on principles of husbandry and feeding

(Commentary: this applies to commonly presented cases and would not, for example, be expected to include advanced nutritional advice for complex cases, eg. high performance horses, high yielding dairy cows, certain exotic or zoological species.)

C1.6 Collect, preserve and transport samples, perform standard laboratory tests, and interpret the results of those generated in-house, as well as those generated by other laboratories

(Commentary: new graduates are expected to have a working knowledge of tests to be undertaken include conditions relating to infectious & contagious diseases; alimentary system; respiratory system; circulatory system; urinary system; nervous system; endocrine system; mucocutaneous system; musculoskeletal system; trauma; poisoning; obstetrics; paediatrics; parturition; reproduction)

C1.7 Use radiographic, ultrasonic, and other technical equipment which can be used as a diagnostic aid, safely and in accordance with current regulations

C1.8 Follow correct procedures after diagnosing notifiable, reportable and zoonotic diseases

C1.9 Know and apply the RCVS twelve Principles of Certification correctly

C1.10 Access the appropriate sources of data on licensed medicines; prescribe and dispense medicines correctly and responsibly in accordance with relevant legislation and ensure that medicines and waste are safely stored and/or disposed of

C1.11 Correctly apply principles of sterilisation of surgical equipment

C1.12 Correctly apply principles of aseptic surgery

C1.13 Safely perform sedation, general and regional anaesthesia, implement chemical methods of restraint, and assess and control pain

C1.14 Advise on, and administer appropriate treatment

(Commentary: the new veterinary surgeon must always seek professional advice and support if presented with a case beyond his or her immediate capability – see item A.12)

C1.15 Recognise when euthanasia is necessary and perform it humanely, using an appropriate method, whilst showing sensitivity to the feelings of owners and others, and with due regard to the safety of those present; advise on disposal of the carcass

C1.16 Perform a basic gross post mortem examination, record details, sample tissues, store and transport them

C1.17 Perform ante mortem inspection of animals destined for the food chain and correctly identify conditions affecting the quality and safety of products of animal origin

- C1.18 Assess and implement basic health and welfare records (and production records where appropriate)
- C1.19 Advise on, and carry out preventive and prophylactic programmes appropriate to the species and commensurate with accepted animal health, welfare and public health standards, seeking advice and assistance where necessary from professional colleagues
- C1.20 Minimise the risks of contamination, cross infection and accumulation of pathogens in the veterinary premises and in the field.

RCVS, 2006