

RCVS EMS Policy and Guidance 2024

Introduction

Extra Mural Studies (EMS) is a part of students' overall clinical education, and placements are a vital component of the veterinary degree as they provide a unique opportunity for students to gain valuable hands-on experience and practice skills acquired during the veterinary programme further in range of 'real' workplace learning contexts. Students are required to identify their own intended learning outcomes for EMS, with support from the vet school if needed, and undertake EMS placements in areas which complement and enhance their learning and which they feel will benefit them most.

Whilst both Intra-Mural Rotations (IMR) and EMS are experiential, EMS should be focused on students developing their understanding and applying knowledge and skills acquired during the veterinary programme within a range of veterinary workplace contexts. This experiential learning is highly valuable for students as they are able to augment the training they have already received with real-life, hands-on experience that cannot necessarily be captured as part of the formal curriculum, helping them to develop into capable and confident veterinary surgeons. EMS is also an opportunity for students to get further experience in decision making, team working and communication, as well as offer an insight into how finances work in practices away from an academic setting.

EMS placements offer students an important insight and introduction into the professional career of a veterinary surgeon and provide them with vital experience before they graduate. EMS also represents the beginning of a life-long cycle of continuing their own professional development outside of a traditional teaching context, which continues after graduation and throughout their career.

Students will, of course, acquire further knowledge and skills whilst on EMS placements. However, all Day One Competences must be covered by the Clinical Education delivered by the University, and EMS placements should not be used to address gaps within core Clinical Education.

This policy was introduced in August 2024 for veterinary students beginning their programme in August 2024, and those starting their studies thereafter. Existing students (those enrolled prior to August 2024) will continue on the 2023 EMS policy.

Any questions relating to this policy should be sent to EMS@rcvs.org.uk

EMS Policy

Overview: amount and type of EMS

1. A total of **30 weeks** of EMS must be completed over the course of the veterinary degree programme before students are able to graduate.
2. Of these, **10 weeks** must be devoted to **animal husbandry EMS (AHEMS)**, to be completed throughout the pre-clinical years of the programme (usually 1st and 2nd years, however this could be up to the 3rd year in extended or intercalated programmes). Where appropriate for the curriculum model, some clinical EMS may be completed before the third year. However, in these instances, students must have been assessed as being competent and safe in animal handling for relevant species prior to the placement being undertaken.
3. The remaining **20 weeks** must be undertaken as **clinical EMS**, to be completed regularly over the final 3 years of the course (or clinical years) before graduation, with a recommended minimum of 6 weeks to be completed per year.

Animal Husbandry EMS (AHEMS) – 10 weeks

4. Animal husbandry EMS takes place during the earlier years of the veterinary degree course to allow students to gain further experience in animal handling and husbandry in all common domestic species, in authentic working environments where animals may be less used to being handled than in academic settings. Students will also begin to develop their professional skills with clients and animal owners on AHEMS placements.
5. A minimum of 10 weeks of is required. Students are permitted to carry out further weeks of AHEMS should they wish (this would be separate to the 20 weeks of clinical EMS).
6. Students must be permitted to choose placements based on their own learning and experience needs. Once a student has identified their learning and experience needs (with the support of university tutors if required), their intended learning outcomes (ILOs) for EMS placements must be agreed with their tutor and discussed with any potential placement provider prior to the placement being booked / confirmed. This will ensure that all parties, i.e., the student, the university and the EMS provider, are clear regarding the expectations of the placement.
7. Placements may take place across all major disciplines, and as placements should be based around individual student's needs, veterinary schools are not permitted to set specific species requirements for AHEMS placements. However, students are encouraged to complete placements which offer them a breadth of experience across different species in order to complement their studies.

8. Schools must ensure that students have been taught appropriately and fully understand the relevant aspects of animal handling and husbandry, including health and safety, prior to going on AHEMS.
9. Universities are permitted to consider granting exemptions to the full 10 weeks AHEMS requirement on a very exceptional basis (up to a maximum of 5 weeks), where a student can provide evidence that they have considerable animal husbandry experience gained on a previous course at tertiary level, or through extensive and relevant work experience. Whilst it is not mandatory for students to make up this reduction in weeks, any time saved by allowing exemption in one particular area should usually be spent on consolidating their skills in other areas, or with other species, where students may not be as familiar/comfortable. The decision on whether a student makes up any exemption is at the discretion of the vet school, following discussions with the student, and in their best interests.
10. All AHEMS placements must take place in person with the student attending on-site. This is to ensure that the student will be directly involved with handling animals and observing animal behaviours during the placement. Any placements where a student is not directly involved in handling animals and/or observing animal behaviours for a significant majority of the time spent there, would not be considered appropriate AHEMS.
11. All AHEMS placements must directly involve the student in a way that helps to broaden their experience, based on the knowledge and skills they have already acquired during their veterinary programme.
12. Placements should normally take place within an environment that is outside of the usual teaching environment of the individual student's own veterinary school. Placements can take place at other veterinary schools that the student is not enrolled at.

Clinical EMS – 20 weeks

13. Clinical EMS placements enable students to further develop the clinical and professional skills that they have been taught at vet school, through experiential learning in real workplace contexts. Clinical EMS placements must take place regularly during the clinical years of the veterinary programme, prior to graduation, with a recommended minimum of 6 weeks completed per year.
14. Students must complete a minimum of 20 weeks clinical EMS prior to graduation and are free to carry out further weeks should they wish and be able to.
15. Students are encouraged to undertake clinical EMS in the areas they feel would interest them and benefit their learning/experience the most. Schools must not impose any restrictions or quota on clinical EMS, e.g., completion of a minimum number of weeks in different species, although students should be encouraged to complete a broad spectrum of opportunities.

16. Once a student has identified their learning and experience needs (with the support of university tutors if required), their intended learning outcomes (ILOs) for EMS placements must be agreed with their tutor and discussed with any potential placement provider prior to the placement being booked/confirmed. This will ensure that all parties, i.e., the student, the university and the EMS provider, are clear regarding the expectations of the placement.
17. Clinical EMS must complement what students have learned in the core curriculum (e.g., in practical classes, clinics etc.) but not replace any element of core competency education. EMS placements should provide students with the opportunity to consolidate learning and skills which have already been actively taught during their veterinary programme and apply this across different professional contexts. It is acknowledged that students may learn new techniques and acquire further knowledge whilst on clinical EMS placements, however the responsibility of formally teaching students must remain with the veterinary school.
18. Clinical EMS must take place in person, with the student attending on-site getting “hands-on”, direct clinical experience with animals. This is to ensure that the EMS placement provides the student with the opportunity to further develop the skills they have learned through formal teaching on the programme. Clinical EMS placements should usually take place within an environment that is outside of the usual teaching environment of the individual student's own veterinary school. Placements can take place at partner practices of the student's veterinary school and also other veterinary schools that the student is not enrolled at.
19. Long term research placements that do not primarily involve animals can count towards the clinical EMS requirement at the discretion of the school, if a student has an interest in entering the research field, for example.

Professional EMS

20. Where a student has a genuine interest in a career that may not be clinically or research based, “Professional EMS” placements can be permitted in place of some clinical EMS at the school's discretion. These could be placements that are not necessarily clinically based or directly involving animals. However, Professional EMS must still be a work-based placement in a working environment that is relevant to the veterinary profession. Online learning, whilst useful, is not permitted as EMS as all placements must take place in-person.

Guidance on RCVS EMS Policy

This document should be read in conjunction with the RCVS EMS Policy (2024)

Placement approval

1. The RCVS EMS Policy (2024) must be implemented by the veterinary school, and the school will be required to approve all EMS placements. Where flexibility is allowed for within the policy, the veterinary school is responsible for making the decision on what is an acceptable EMS placement. Schools must be able to evidence that the EMS policy has been implemented effectively, including that appropriate and sufficient EMS has been completed by students and that ILOs are being agreed between student and tutor, and student and provider before placements take place.

Number of weeks

2. As stated in the policy, the requirement for completion of EMS is 30 weeks: 10 weeks animal husbandry EMS (AHEMS); and 20 weeks clinical EMS. This is the minimum requirement – students can complete further weeks of EMS if they wish.
3. A typical working week would normally equate to 35-40 hours. The duration of a 'week' should primarily be based on the EMS providers' typical working week. For example, many providers will operate a 5-day working week (Monday to Friday). However, if a placement provider has asked the student to be present across 6 days from Monday to Saturday, but from 9am – 3pm, then that may also constitute one week. It is also accepted that some providers may operate 4-day weeks, perhaps with longer working days. The vet school will always have the final approval on what constitutes a "week" of EMS, and it is advised that common sense and discretion is applied. Exceptions can be made for bank holidays.
4. Vet schools must make allowances for flexibility in terms of how the EMS requirement is met. Placements may not necessarily have to take place over consecutive days. For example, a student could attend a placement over consecutive weekends, or a series of 1 or half day placements, which could count towards the requirement. Typically, 5 full days would count as 1 week of EMS.
5. EMS should be arranged outside of timetabled university activities. If a placement should fall outside the time of a usual university week, for example, a placement finishing on a Sunday night, making it unsafe for a student to travel back in time for a Monday lecture, the student should liaise with the school with regards to the most appropriate action. Schools have autonomy to make allowances for students' absence from lectures or other timetabled university activity (other than IMR) or could discuss alternative hours with the provider to allow students to return to their timetabled activities.

International EMS placements

6. Both AHEMS and clinical EMS placements may take place overseas at the discretion and approval of the vet school. Schools must ensure that such placements have the appropriate insurance arrangements in place. Appropriate insurance shall provide coverage for (1) any errors or incidents arising from a student's actions during EMS, and (2) any injuries, accidents, or unforeseen events affecting the student while undertaking their EMS placement. The placement should offer a safe learning experience for students.

Intended Learning Outcomes

7. As outlined in the EMS policy, intended learning outcomes (ILOs) must be discussed and agreed between all parties (student, school and provider) before EMS placements can go ahead, both for AHEMS and clinical EMS. This aims to ensure that the placement is aligned with the student's learning needs and that the provider is aware of the expectations as much as is possible.
8. When approaching EMS placement providers, the student should share their ILOs with them and seek agreement from them that their placement could offer relevant experience to meet these needs before the placement is fully confirmed and approved.
9. ILOs for more than one EMS placement can be agreed between the student and the tutor at the same time. ILOs should be individual to each student based on their own needs and interests, however, it is acknowledged that some can be more generic and some can be shared by more than one student, especially for some animal husbandry placements.
10. It is acknowledged that, despite communication prior to placements, ILOs may not necessarily be able to be met on placements due to a number of factors out of the control of the provider. ILOs may also change prior to (or during) a placement, and this is acceptable as long as all parties are in agreement and are fully aware of any changes. However, these should only be influenced by genuine learning needs and ILOs should not be changed only to secure more readily available placements.
11. ILOs for EMS placements are not the same as formal learning outcomes or objectives set as part of the main veterinary degree programme. EMS placements will not be formally assessed in terms of students meeting any intended outcomes, however ILOs should be the focus of students reflection following placements.

Restrictions on EMS: Species requirements

12. There are no specific species requirements as part of the RCVS EMS Policy for either AHEMS or clinical EMS, and as stated, vet schools are not permitted to implement their own species requirements in addition to the RCVS EMS Policy

Types of EMS placement

13. The school is responsible for approving placement types, in line with the EMS policy. Online learning, whilst useful, is not permitted as EMS as all placements must take place in-person. It is acknowledged that as part of a clinical EMS placement, students may observe practice meetings that take place remotely. However, remote observation of clinics must not be allowed to count as EMS. This is not to say that it would not be beneficial learning for students, but the overall aim of EMS is to gain hands-on experience.
14. EMS placements must directly involve animals, unless they fall under the description of research placements or professional EMS as set out in the EMS policy. Such placements would be permitted at the discretion of the school.
15. Attendance at congresses or conferences is not permitted to count as any form of AHEMS or clinical EMS, either in-person or online. This excludes attendance if it forms part of a Professional EMS placement, for example a placement with a veterinary business and working on a stand as an exhibitor. However, it should not form the whole placement.
16. RCVS expects the majority of EMS placements to take place off-campus and away from university farms or hospitals, to allow students to gain further experience outside of the veterinary school environment.

Length of placement

17. Clinical EMS placements lasting at least 2 weeks generally allow time for students to get a better feel for the environment and cases seen whilst on placement, as well as being able to give the provider more time to be able to offer more effective mentorship and guidance. Therefore, longer placements, either consecutively or split up over a longer period should also be encouraged if students are able to find willing providers, as more time can be spent devoted to seeing cases rather than “settling in”.
18. EMS can be completed flexibly by students. Individual placements of 1 week or individual days over consecutive weeks are permitted. Although EMS is recorded in weeks overall, this can be met flexibly through shorter or longer periods. There is no maximum limit to a placement length. However, it is recognised that the length of any particular placement would likely be influenced by a combination of any, or all, of the schools’ timetables and curricula; availability of the provider; and the student’s own time and availability.

Professional EMS

19. The emphasis for clinical EMS needing to take place in a clinical environment involving live animals is reflective of the understanding that the majority of graduates will work in clinical practice, and therefore the RCVS would expect students to gain as much experience in clinical areas as possible before graduation. However, it is recognised that not all graduates will move into clinical practice, or may still be unsure, whilst studying, therefore the potential for some ‘professional’ or non-clinical EMS is possible. Professional EMS should only be permitted at the

school's discretion if a student has a genuine interest in a particular area of non-clinical work. Online learning, whilst useful, is not permitted as EMS as all placements must take place in-person.