



Association of Veterinary Students



Pre-clinical EMS guide

Written by students, for students

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Everyone turns up to vet school with differing levels of experience in many diverse areas, so we have produced this guide to help you out in areas you may be feeling less confident in. The guide covers:

 **How to go about finding a placement**

 **Things to consider when booking your placement**

 **Common jobs which you might be expected to do**

 **Things to find out when you're there, including questions to ask**

*Written by students, for students we hope the guide is easy to read and refer to**

*Each university has its own specific requirements for preclinical EMS – AVS accepts no responsibility for contradicting any of these!

General advice

Booking placements

Making a phone call to arrange a placement can be daunting, especially if the contact is unknown to you. Make sure you are prepared with the key questions so you don't end up putting the phone down having only gotten half the information you need!

- ▶ Know the **name** of the person you are contacting and try to remember this for when you get there.
- ▶ **Dates** you are available and **not** available.
- ▶ What to wear – do they provide any **clothing**? How smart is the establishment?
- ▶ What to **bring** – usually just yourself and a packed lunch, but worth checking.
- ▶ Expected working **hours**.
- ▶ Where and who to report to on **arrival** – this can sometimes be tricky on farms where there is no obvious 'entrance' so always ask.
- ▶ Where to **park**/where **not** to park.
- ▶ **Accommodation** details, if required.
- ▶ **Other specifics** relating to the type of placement – see each section of the guide.

Post placement checklist

- ▶ **Say thank you!** A quick thankyou note always goes down well and will leave the farmer/staff with a lovely positive memory of having vet students with them, so they agree to take more!
- ▶ **Reflect** on what you learnt. Where was good welfare demonstrated and what could have been improved? Write down the things that interested you as you'll quickly forget.
- ▶ Make sure all your university **paperwork** is up-to-date so the placement gets logged.



As a British Veterinary Association (BVA) student member you receive free EMS insurance.

Going out on EMS each year can be stressful enough without having to worry about what will happen if you have an accident while on your placement. BVA provides free EMS insurance cover for every BVA student member.

Student members of BVA benefit from a number of services, including a free personal accident, liability and hospital cash package. These benefits are only applicable while directly involved in university tutorial activities or associated work experience.

For more information visit www.bva.co.uk/students

Pig farm placements



📍 Finding a placement

Pig farms can be difficult to find as they are decreasing in number in the UK. Your university may have a database which previous students have added to. Word of mouth is probably still the best way to find a placement – every vet student has to go to a pig farm so ask around!

Occasionally pig farms may want to confirm your status as a vet student due to an incident in the past involving animal rights protestors posing as vet students in order to gain access. An email from your university or a copy of your student card should be sufficient.

📖 Things to consider

Do they use an indoor or outdoor system? An indoor system is more intense and there may be more jobs to keep you entertained. An outdoor system gives a different perspective on the industry. However, animal contact may be limited as the sows are more self-sufficient. Some universities require that you see both types of unit.

How many pigs do they have? The bigger the farm, the more you will get to do and see.

What type of farrowing do they have? If it is continuous you will get to see lots of piglets! However, if it is a batch system, make sure that you go during a week they are farrowing, otherwise you may have a very unexciting placement.

Common jobs to expect

- ▶ Feeding and bedding up
- ▶ Visual health checking pigs
- ▶ Identifying sows/gilts on oestrus
- ▶ Helping with insemination – as a student you probably won't be allowed in with the boar as they can be unpredictable.
- ▶ Care of new-born piglets tail docking, iron injections
- ▶ Plus general farm jobs e.g. scraping out
- ▶ Moving sows, piglets and boars (harder than it sounds!)

Questions to ask

- ▶ What breed of pigs do they use and why?
- ▶ Where do their pigs go after slaughter? Supermarkets, local butchers, their own butchery?
- ▶ What weight do the pigs go to slaughter at?
- ▶ What do they vaccinate against?
- ▶ Any dietary supplements given?
- ▶ What do they feed their pigs? How does this change through different stages of production?
- ▶ What age do they wean at?
- ▶ Any common diseases they have a problem with?
- ▶ What bedding do they use and where is it sourced from?

Dairy farm placements



📍 Finding a placement

Dairy farms shouldn't be too tricky to find. There is a higher prevalence of dairy farming in the west of the UK, particularly the south western counties.

📄 Things to consider

- ▶ **Accommodation.** Staying with the farmer and being immersed in the dairy culture 24/7 is a great way to fully understand the workings of the farm you may even get to experience the thrill of a night time calving!
- ▶ **Does the farmer want you to attend morning milking?** This will give you a true understanding of the dairy farming lifestyle, but not completely necessary if you're milking in the afternoon anyway. Morning milking can be very early in the morning, so staying at the farm may be of advantage when it comes to hours in bed.
- ▶ **How many cows do they have?** As with most farms, the more animals the busier it will be.
- ▶ **Are they block calvers or do they calve all year round?** Working on a block calving dairy farm during their calving period will give you a lot of experience with calving. However, you are less likely to get hands on experience milking as there will be less cows being milked and a high proportion of first time milkers that can be more dangerous in the parlour.

Common jobs to expect

- ▶ Milking cows – having a sound understanding of what goes on in the milking parlour will stand you in good stead for clinical teaching.
- ▶ Treating cows for mastitis
- ▶ Feeding cows
- ▶ Caring for new-born calves (feeding and bedding up)
- ▶ Observing cows to detect whether they are in oestrus

Questions to ask

- ▶ What breeds of cattle are on the farm? What advantages do these breeds have?
- ▶ What are the cows fed on – do they receive a large amount of concentrates or mainly grass-based grazing?
- ▶ What is the average yield per cow in the herd?
- ▶ Who does the farmer sell their milk to? How much are they paid per litre?
- ▶ Find out more about the farming system: Does the farm aim for high volume or high quality (high fat and protein) milk?
- ▶ What happens to their milk – is it made into cheese or yogurt?
- ▶ At what age does the farm aim to get heifers pregnant?
- ▶ How much AI do they use?
- ▶ How is the reproductive performance of the herd?
- ▶ Is lameness a problem on the farm? How often do they do hoof trimming?
- ▶ What protocols do they have for rearing heifers? How do they keep levels of diarrhoeal disease and pneumonia low?
- ▶ What is the average somatic cell count of the cows in the herd?
- ▶ Do they have problems with mastitis? How are they managing this?
- ▶ How big is the farm? Do they grow any crops? If so, what do they grow and are they sold or fed to the stock?
- ▶ The 'industry overview' section of www.dairyuk.org has a useful overview of the different dairy farm systems in the UK

Exotics placements



There are several options for exotics placements for pre-clinical EMS, many of which can be done overseas as well. There is limited exotic teaching at the UK vet schools and EMS can be a great way to increase your basic husbandry skills with exotic species.

📍 Finding a placement

Zoos, wildlife sanctuaries, rehabilitation centres and wildlife parks are all options available in the UK and overseas. Some zoos in the UK may require early application.

Remember, if you choose to go overseas contacting placements may be more difficult and you are less likely to be able to guarantee the usefulness of a placement.

📄 Things to consider

- ▶ What species will you be working with?
- ▶ How much hands on experience will you be able to get with those species?
- ▶ How many animals does the establishment have?
- ▶ Do you require any specific vaccinations to work with the species?
- ▶ What protective clothing will you need/do they provide?

📁 Common jobs to expect

- ▶ Feeding many different species
- ▶ Cleaning enclosures/tanks/cages
- ▶ Counting animals – (stock checks)
- ▶ Engaging with the public, if at a zoo, and being asked lots of tricky questions!

❓ Questions to ask

- ▶ What are the specific husbandry requirements of different species? i.e. diet, environment, stimulation etc.
- ▶ How are the more dangerous species managed within their environment? What precautions are taken and any specific handling techniques?
- ▶ What are the common diseases associated with different species and how are they managed?
- ▶ What sort of routine veterinary care do the animals receive? E.g. vaccinations, preventative medicine.
- ▶ Which of the animals are successfully bred in captivity? What sort of reproductive management is used in different species?
- ▶ What qualifications do the staff working with the exotic animals have?

Lambing placements



🕒 Finding a placement

This is actually pretty easy for lambing as lots of farmers want your help! Some farmers will advertise to vet students through your university, or via students who went the previous year. You can also find placements through the National Sheep association; in the next generation section of their website (www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nextgeneration) they have a list of farmers looking for students to help out.

Although you can find sheep farms nationwide there is an especially high density in Wales, Cumbria, Northumberland and Scotland.

📄 Things to consider

- ▶ **Is there accommodation?** It's not absolutely necessary to stay at the farm, but you may find that you see and do more if you do. Also, you are likely to be very well fed, which is always a plus!
- ▶ **How many ewes?** This is very important because it directly affects how much experience you are going to get you are going to see a lot more lambing on a 1000 ewe farm than 100.
- ▶ **Will the lambing be indoor or outdoor?** Outdoor is generally colder and involves more running to catch sheep!
- ▶ **What breed of sheep is there on the farm?** The breed of sheep can make a difference due to how tame they are, how easy to lamb, and their natural mothering abilities.

- ▶ **Will you be expected to work night shifts?** On some placements you will be expected to check the ewes in the night or even do full night shifts. While night shifts can be pretty fun, it's always a good idea to know exactly much sleep you'll be getting!
- ▶ **Money** one of the big perks of lambing is that most farmers will pay you for your time!

Common jobs to expect

- ▶ General jobs such as feeding, watering, bedding up etc.
- ▶ Lambing: the exciting bit!
- ▶ Lamb care: identifying hungry lambs, stomach tubing, bottle feeding, castrating, tail docking.
- ▶ Fostering lambs – different farms may have different ways of doing this.
- ▶ Catching sheep – the art of the crook!
- ▶ Identifying sheep that are lambing/need attention.
- ▶ Marking up sheep and their lambs.
- ▶ 'Drenching' ewes with wormer.
- ▶ Identifying and treating ewes with pregnancy toxaemia.
- ▶ Moving ewes/ewes and lambs. Knowing how to handle sheep is one of the most important things that you can learn lambing.

Questions to ask

- ▶ Breeds: what terminal sire do they use? Do they breed their own replacements (there may be a whole hill of horned ewes that you never see doing indoor lambing).
- ▶ Nutrition: what do they feed, to which groups? Do they separate singles and triplets? How do they feed the ewes at other times of year?
- ▶ Disease control: how do they control worms? What vaccines do they use?
- ▶ Lambs: where and when do they sell their lambs? Do they finish them on grass, concentrates or keep stores?
- ▶ The EBLEX Better Returns Programme (www.eblex.org.uk/returns) has a series of booklets on sheep farm productivity, but make pretty good sheep farming for dummies guides then you can seem really clued up!

Small animal placements



🕒 Finding a placement

Small animal placements are available in a huge variety and are available all over the UK. The main types of placement include:

Rescue and rehabilitation centres:

For a wide variety of species including 'small mammal' as well as cats and dogs. Great when learning to adapt handling procedures to an individual animal that you do not know as there is sure to be a combination of characters here!

Commercial kennels and catteries:

There is often a fear that these can become repetitive. However, remember that every establishment is run differently, consider the opportunities for socialising and investigating the effects of stress on an individual.

Hunt kennels:

This will provide a much more commercial view of small animal. Take an interest in the training, work and value of these animals. The group dynamic is key to how these hunts work.

📄 Things to consider

- ▶ *How many animals are expected to be there?* If it's a holiday cattery during school term – will there be any animals there?!
- ▶ *How much hands on experience will you be involved in?*

Common jobs to expect

- ▶ Exercising/grooming/feeding animals
- ▶ Cleaning enclosures
- ▶ Assisting with basic treatments
- ▶ Basic daily health checks of animals

Questions to ask

- ▶ What vaccination/worming/flea treatment policies are in place?
- ▶ Have there been any problems with any of these presently or in the past – elimination method?
- ▶ Disease control – any screening or emergency quarantine protocols in place?
- ▶ How individualised nutrition is – (e.g. donations by public or feed delivered by owner) Costs or problems associated with this e.g. if by donation – constantly changing diet.
- ▶ What are the exercise regimes for different animals?
- ▶ Do they have a routine vet visit?
- ▶ What qualifications are held by those employed at the establishment?

Equine placements



🕒 Finding a placement

Equine establishments are found all over the UK and there are many different types of places you can go. The most important thing to remember to get the most out of your placement is to go somewhere you can improve your husbandry skills without being over faced.

📄 Things to consider

One thing to make very clear to the place you are going to is how much previous experience you have. If you don't have much experience it is important to realise some people may incorrectly assume that as a vet student you know what you are doing around horses.

Placements at riding schools are generally basic and allow you to improve your confidence around horses (essential if you haven't much prior experience no matter how confident you think you will be). If you want more of a challenge, but still doing reasonable hours, try a private livery yard as this can also give you some experience dealing with horse owners. If you are a confident 'horsey' person why not try a stud or a race yard. If you're lucky you may also get to see a more clinical side of things and learn more about equine reproduction, but beware of more unfriendly hours!

Common jobs to expect

- ▶ Completing daily basic health checks on all horses (checking for lameness, minor injuries etc.)
- ▶ Catching horses from the field and turning horses out
- ▶ Feeding/grooming.
- ▶ Maintaining cleanliness of yard.
- ▶ Assisting in basic treatments e.g. applying topical treatment to a horse with sweet itch.
- ▶ Tacking up for riding lessons and un-tacking and cleaning tack
- ▶ Leading horses during riding lessons.

Questions to ask

- ▶ What are the specific feeding and exercise routines of the horses? Try to develop an understanding of why this is different for different horses.
- ▶ As a potential horse vet who may not own their own beast, it is important to understand the cost of keeping a horse: what is the cost of a bale of hay? How much is a rug?
- ▶ Where is the forage and feed sourced from? How does the yard manage their grass and field rotations? Find out about the relationship between farmers and horse owners.
- ▶ Does the yard have specific vaccination/quarantine/worming/insurance policies? Why are these in place and are they effective? Find out more about horse passports and any potential movement restrictions.
- ▶ How often are the horses seen by the dentist or vet? Find out how often horses should have certain procedures and horse owners' differing attitudes towards them.
- ▶ How often does the farrier visit the yard? A really useful experience can be to spend some time with a farrier while you are there. They can often tell you more about horses' feet than many vets and a good one can be very valuable to a vet in aiding diagnoses and working on prognoses.
- ▶ Find out about the importance of good saddlery – even better if you get to see a saddler in action whilst you are there.

Chicken farm placements



Poultry EMS is required by some schools and for others it can be great to get an idea of a species and an industry you probably have very limited experience with. However, it can very easily be a boring placement if you don't prepare for it well, so it's worth finding things out first.

📍 Finding a placement

The poultry industry is a diverse one, an experience in a rare breed free range duck farm will be very different to a barn reared intensive broiler unit so make sure you know what type of farm you are applying to. Unlike many stables or kennels, most chicken farmers will never have had a student before; this can be great as many are very keen for you to have a good experience, but can equally mean they haven't thought through what you might be able to do. Many chicken farms are entirely automated so there will be nothing for you to do except pack egg boxes... probably not how you want to spend your summer!! It's worth checking you are going somewhere with sufficient work for you to get stuck in.

The best poultry placements are at hatcheries or at large establishments where they will have birds at several stages of the process so you get a better idea of the industry. Many larger farms even have their own vets and nutritionists so you might get a chance to go round several farms with them and see more interesting cases.

Things to consider

- ▶ Many farms operate an all in all out policy, so make sure there will be birds there the week you're planning to go!
- ▶ A few farms may require no contact with poultry for a period before the placement so if you own backyard hens or come into contact with poultry it's worth checking.
- ▶ It is worth checking if you will be able to leave in periods where there may not be anything to do if not it might be worth bringing work so something else to do in quiet periods.

Common jobs to expect

- ▶ Feeding chickens
- ▶ Cleaning enclosures
- ▶ Medicating water
- ▶ Collecting, washing and weighing/grading eggs
- ▶ Vaccinating chicks
- ▶ General health assessments of birds
- ▶ Hatchery work – turning eggs, managing heat lamps, helping chicks out of their shells.

Questions to ask

- ▶ It is good to discuss the merits of free range versus barn or caged systems with farmers and the merits of higher welfare schemes such as RSPCA Freedom Foods. You might well find what you buy in the shops changes after a placement!
- ▶ Nutrition is absolutely key to poultry health and the growth rates required; asking about feed will impress the farmer and can be very interesting.
- ▶ Find out what vaccinations chickens receive before arriving on the farm and what medicines they receive once there. It can be very interesting to discuss prophylactic antibiotic usage and other in feed medications.
- ▶ Ask about all in all out systems and cleaning protocols... it may sound dull but it's a big part of the poultry industry and can be useful in later exams!



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