



VETERINARY COUNCIL OF IRELAND STANDARDS OF ACCREDITATION FOR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES OF VETERINARY NURSING IN IRELAND

COMPETENCIES, BENCHMARKS AND ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

The Veterinary Council of Ireland adopts an amended version of the Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education (ACOVENE) competencies. In addition to the competencies, a number of benchmarks which the panel of experts carrying out an accreditation visitation on behalf of the Veterinary Council of Ireland will give particular attention to, have been included.

COMPETENCIES

The Veterinary Council adopts ACOVENE Dossier of European Competences for the Veterinary Nurse (April 2022). These competencies have been amended to take into account additional factors in the Irish context. The Veterinary Council of Ireland 32 Competencies fit within the ACOVENE 13 broader competencies (see appendix 1). Both the VCI and ACOVENE competencies list the skills and attributes that the newly graduated veterinary nurse should be expected to demonstrate. The ACOVENE competencies are defined and discussed in the following sections. However, it is a matter for the course provider to select the best ways to demonstrate evidence of these competencies.

1 Health and safety

About this competence

This competence sets the standards to promote, monitor and maintain health and safety in the veterinary setting (based on national health and safety legislation, to demonstrate knowledge of quality assurance systems and to apply principles of risk management in practice. It 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 including high risk groups in practices.

Competences:

1. Promote, monitor, and maintain health and safety in the workplace.
 - a. Identify health and safety risks in relation to people, equipment, and materials in the workplace.
 - b. Knowledge and explanation of the procedure for reporting adverse incidents and procedures for avoiding them.
2. Prepare a safety statement for the veterinary practice.
3. Disposal of hazardous/non-hazardous types of waste.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the organisation and legislation related to a veterinary business.
 - a. Knowledge of legislation affecting veterinary practices, such as radiation, the disposal of clinical waste and safety of medicines.
5. Maintain good standards of health and safety.
 - a. Deal with accidents which cause personal injury and adverse changes in an individual's health which puts them at risk.
6. Handle and restrain animal patients safely and humanely.

7. Recognise suspicious signs of possible reportable and zoonotic diseases, ensure that the veterinary practitioner is informed and that appropriate measures are taken, including observing the appropriate health and safety recommendations.

a. Identify the clinical signs, clinical cause, and transmission potential (including vectors) of pathogens associated with common zoonotic and food- borne diseases and transboundary animal diseases.

8. Apply principles of bio-security correctly, including sterilisation of equipment and disinfection of clothing.

a. Maintain high standards of biosecurity at all times to minimize risk of contamination, cross infection, and accumulation of pathogens in veterinary premises and the wider environment.

9. Maintain personal hygiene.

2 Developing personal performance and maintaining working relationships

About this Competence

This competence sets the standard for maintaining working relationships. The first element is about your personal performance within the workplace. This relates to achieving certain targets and finishing specific tasks. It also relates to the quality of your work and a conscious attitude and approach to life-long learning and practising evidence-based veterinary nursing. It is also about working effectively with other people. This includes communicating clearly, co-operating with others, and helping to improve working practices. Inter-professional relationships and communicating professionally with members of other professions is also an important aspect of this competence.

Competences:

1. Understand risk factors and conditions within a working environment that may cause stress and potential mental health problems.

2. Recognise symptoms of prolonged stress and mental health issues in order to know and understand when and how to seek help.
3. Recognise personal and professional limitations and know how to seek guidance, professional advice, and assistance when necessary.
4. Be able to critically evaluate literature and conduct independent research.
5. Understand and apply the VCI Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses, rules, and legislation, and be able to reflect and discuss professional ethics.
 - a. It is very important that veterinary nurses demonstrate conscious professional attitudes and behaviours when performing their work in line with national legislation, and according to their Code of Professional Conduct. This includes being able to reflect on their own practice and implement necessary change.
6. Communicate in a professional manner with colleagues, clients, authorities, the public and others.
7. Be able to perform and collaborate professionally in a multi-disciplinary team thus delivering services of a professional standard.

3 - Carry out veterinary reception duties

About this competence

About this competence This competence is about carrying out general veterinary reception duties. It covers making appointments for clients and their animals, receiving clients and their animals for appointments, processing payments for veterinary services, admitting animals for care and other administrative tasks. This is important for a veterinary nurse as it helps to maintain good relationships with clients, referring colleagues and the public so they continue to have confidence in the services given.

Competences:

1. Perform administrative reception duties in such a way that clients and employer are satisfied and contribute to an efficiently run workplace.
2. Admit and discharge patients ensuring efficient transfer of information to and from client and advising client on care for their animals in an efficient manner.
3. Perform appropriate triage with telephone consultations determining the urgency of any given situation and setting up appointments accordingly.
 - a. Demonstrate self-awareness and self-management skills and show ability to reflect on limitations and seek advice when needed.
4. Communicate clearly with referring colleagues or referral services ensuring patient histories are received.
5. Maintain health and safety in the waiting room.

4 - Manage clinical environments for procedures and investigations

About this competence

This competence concerns the ability of the veterinary nurse to prepare the examination area and the patient and to assist the veterinary staff during medical procedures and investigations. It covers preparing clinical environments, equipment, and materials. It also covers preparing the patient and keeping it calm and comfortable in order for the veterinarian to perform medical procedures and investigations.

Competences:

1. Make sure the examination room is as clean as practicable and is ready to receive clients.
2. Manage the supply of veterinary materials so that there is no shortage or surplus of necessary materials.

3. Handle and restrain animal patients safely and humanely using best practice techniques and restraint aids.
4. Investigate the animal's condition and ensure that the environmental conditions are suitable for the medical procedure or investigation.
5. Be able to prepare for clinical procedures and the administration of medication.

5 Providing emergency first aid to animals

About this competence

This competence is about the veterinary nurse assisting with and giving emergency first aid to animals adequately, taking into consideration laws and regulations.

Competences:

1. Make a rapid risk assessment of the situation of the animal and take appropriate actions for first aid.
2. Stabilise the animal and prevent further deterioration and pain under the direction of the veterinary practitioner.
3. Know when to call for assistance when dealing with any animal.
4. Recognise when information on the patient is incomplete.
5. Be able to do a physical emergency examination of the animal (which may include an assessment of shock and recognition of its stages, such as: assessing pulse, respiration, temperature, mucous membranes, CRT - Capillary Refill Time).
 - a. ABCD(E) is a widespread protocol and can be used in doing this examination.
6. Handle emergency patients safely and humanely in the emergency situation whilst also taking care of their own safety and other nearby persons.

6- Provide and administer nursing care

About this competence

This competence covers providing nursing care to animals with a range of medical and surgical conditions. It includes providing and managing the patients' accommodation while applying principles of bio-security correctly. Included in the competence is the planning and delivery of nursing care plans for patients (together with the veterinarian) with a range of medical and post-surgical conditions.

Competences:

1. Prepare accommodation that is suitable for the patient taking into account the environment, species, age, and clinical condition.
2. Create nursing care plans for the patients (in collaboration with colleagues or the veterinarian as appropriate).
3. Monitor the patient, record findings and provide appropriate nursing care to patients according to their conditions (in collaboration with colleagues or the veterinarian as appropriate).
4. Calculate fluid requirements and administer fluid therapy safely and effectively under the direction of the veterinarian.
5. Evaluate the effectiveness of the nursing care and review the nursing plan (in collaboration with the veterinarian as appropriate).
 - a. Identify any problems with patients, including emergency situations, and take the appropriate action.
 - b. Alert veterinary staff to any problems or complications that may arise concerning

the care of the patient.

c. Interpret patient progression/signs of recovery.

6. Provide clients with the correct information on the condition of their patients in accordance with practice policy.

7. Take care of infection control, including personal and patient hygiene. Know how to apply isolation nursing towards infective and zoonotic disease.

7- Supporting clients in caring for animals

About this Competence

This competence is about supporting clients in caring for animals. It covers supporting clients during the provision of veterinary services, advising clients on the care of animals, showing clients how to care for animals, providing veterinary materials to clients and discharging animals from care.

Competences:

1. Inform and instruct clients in the care of their animals in addition to offering relevant advice and guidance.

a. This may include how to medicate, exercise, and give general care ensuring owner compliance when discharging animals from the workplace.

b. Includes explaining treatment regimens advised by the veterinarian ensuring owner compliance and understanding.

2. Inform and advise clients on preventive medicine appropriate to species.

a. Accessing health records will aid in giving appropriate advice.

3. Inform and advise clients on nutritional needs and specialised nutritional diets for their animals.

4. Provide veterinary materials to clients with professional advice and guidance in the use and disposal of these materials.

a. May include medication, specialised diets, other consumables and in accordance with national legislation.

5. Support (and empathise) with the client when there is a need for euthanasia and the options available.

8 Perform Laboratory Diagnostic Tests

About this competence

This competence is about performing diagnostic tests. The veterinary nurse needs to know about the maintenance of equipment and materials for diagnostic testing. The veterinary nurse prepares animals for collecting samples, collects and preserves samples for diagnostic tests. The veterinary nurse also carries out the diagnostic tests and communicates the results.

Competences:

1. Carry out diagnostic tests, including the preparation and the maintenance of equipment and materials.
2. Maintain equipment (cleaning, replacement, service, or repair).
3. Identify faults that can affect the accuracy, reliability, and safe usage of equipment and/or faults that can occur with materials, including out of date materials, damage, and contamination.
4. Collect or assist with collection of all types of biological material samples (blood, urine, faeces, other).

5. Label all collected samples correctly and store or preserve them accordingly, depending on the scheduled diagnostic tests.
6. Be able to use the analytical equipment available in the clinic/practice in an appropriate manner to make sure results are reliable and the equipment is not damaged.
7. Communicate the results of tests that have been carried out clearly to all relevant parties (veterinarians, nurses, other).

9- Prepare for diagnostic imaging techniques and conduct radiography on animals

About this Competence

This competence is about preparing for a variety of diagnostic imaging techniques and conducting diagnostic imaging. It also covers following good health and safety and current national regulations in relation to the various diagnostic imaging techniques. It involves preparing equipment, materials, and animals for diagnostic imaging techniques. It also involves carrying out radiography, processing radiography images and providing the results for decision making.

Competences:

1. Prepare equipment and materials for various diagnostic imaging techniques.
2. Maintain the equipment and identify faults.
3. Position the animal for diagnostic imaging techniques efficiently and with minimal stress to the animal.
4. Take and process radiographic images of high diagnostic quality, ensuring the safe use of the equipment in accordance with current national regulations, the comfort of the animal during the process and the safety of animal & people at all times following the ALARA principle (as low as reasonably achievable).

a. Processing materials could be either chemicals for conventional radiography or increasingly, digital processing equipment for digital processing.

5. Know how and when these diagnostic imaging methods are used.
6. Prepare equipment and materials for various diagnostic imaging techniques.
7. Maintain the equipment and identify faults.
8. Position the animal for diagnostic imaging techniques efficiently and with minimal stress to the animal.
9. Take and process radiographic images of high diagnostic quality, ensuring the safe use of the equipment in accordance with current national regulations, the comfort of the animal during the process and the safety of animal & people at all times following the ALARA principle (as low as reasonably achievable).

a. Processing materials could be either chemicals for conventional radiography or increasingly, digital processing equipment for digital processing.

10. Know how and when these diagnostic imaging methods are used.

10 Prepare for veterinary surgical procedures

About this Competency

This competence is about preparing for veterinary surgical procedures. It covers preparing surgical environments, including preparation rooms and operation theatres, preparing equipment and materials, and preparing animals for veterinary surgical procedures.

Competences:

1. Be able to prepare the preparation room, the surgical theatre, and the patient.

2. Be able to select and prepare the right surgical equipment and materials for surgical procedures and successful operation.
3. Apply principles of biosecurity correctly, including sterilisation of equipment and disinfection of clothing.
4. Assist the veterinary surgeon during surgical procedures.
5. Be able to transfer anaesthetised animal safely into the operating theatre. Place and restrain the patient appropriately using suitable restraining equipment and methods.

11- Assist the veterinary surgeon during surgical procedures

About this competency

This competence is about the duties and conduct of veterinary nurses while assisting the veterinary surgeon during surgical procedures. It covers the provision of equipment and materials during surgical procedures and assisting with the surgical procedure itself. It also covers monitoring and assisting the recovery of the patient after such procedures.

Competences:

1. Assist the veterinary surgeon, as a scrubbed veterinary nurse, while performing surgical procedures on patients and behaving appropriately in the operating theatre. Be able to handle equipment and materials in a sterile manner during surgical procedures.
2. Be able to deliver the necessary post-operative care for the patient taking into account the species, the condition of the animal and the surgical procedure performed. Monitor and record the animal's recovery appropriately and be able to assess the degree of pain and any expected complication from the surgery.
3. Inform the owner about the care and treatments needed during the recovery period in a clear and understandable manner.

12 Assist in the provision of anaesthetics to animals

About this Competence

This competence covers assisting with the preparation for and provision of safe anesthesia (induction, maintenance, and recovery) to animals and with monitoring progress of anaesthetised animals. National regulations on the use of anesthetics must be taken into consideration.

Competences:

1. Preparing the animal for anaesthesia.

- a. Comply with regulations and guidelines relating to the use and disposal of anesthetic equipment, materials, and gases at all times.

2. Administering and maintaining anaesthetics to the animal thereby assisting the veterinary surgeon during surgery and other procedures.

- a. This must be under supervision of the veterinary practitioner and according to the Code of Professional Conduct.
- b. Monitor and record clinical signs carefully and bring any indications of problems to the attention of the veterinary surgeon.
- c. The veterinary nurse must consider the animal's condition.
- d. Assess depth of anaesthesia and alert the veterinary practitioner.

3. Reduce and stop the anaesthetic procedure at the correct stages of the surgical procedure.

- a. Disconnect the animal carefully from anesthetic equipment, materials, and gases.

4. Monitor the patient during all stages of recovery from anaesthesia.

13 Dispense and administer medication

This competence is about the safe dispensing and administration of medicines.

Competences:

1. Dispense and administer medicines correctly and responsibly in accordance with veterinary surgeon direction, legislation, and latest guidance.
2. Consider the patients' needs and any health and safety issues associated with the medicines used.
3. Understand the risk of antimicrobial resistance.
4. Take into account patient needs in terms of the administration route of the medication.
5. Be aware of suspected adverse reactions and alert the veterinary surgeon.
6. The veterinary nurse should be aware of any national Veterinary Medicines Regulations.

ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

Our aim in accreditation is to ensure that programmes of Veterinary Nursing are:

- well managed
- run sustainably
- have the appropriate resources (people, facilities, and animals)

- provide a relevant curriculum
- provide appropriate support to students in their learning
- operate fair, valid, and reliable assessment systems
- operate robust quality assurance and quality enhancement mechanisms.

BENCHMARKS

Additional Requirements

Supports for Resilience, Mental Health, and Wellbeing

The educational institution must clearly demonstrate that veterinary nursing students are afforded appropriate training and support in the realm of professional resilience, mental health, and wellbeing as part of their education and training to becoming qualified veterinary nurses. Training relating to resilience, mental health, and wellbeing should be treated with openness and proactivity. Support systems for students and staff must be available as appropriate and where required.

There should be appropriate systems in place throughout the duration of the programme to manage career expectations and generate an awareness of the general mental health and wellbeing challenges faced by the profession as a whole. Graduates must be prepared in order to enter the profession with a sense of knowledge about the challenges they and their peers may encounter, and a knowledge about the assistance resources that are available.

Promotes Sustainability

The educational institution must clearly demonstrate that veterinary nursing students are afforded appropriate training in the awareness, practice, and promotion of environmental sustainability within their work e.g., practicing responsible resource use, reducing carbon footprint, and using medicines responsibly. Education for sustainability should ensure that veterinary nursing students understand the interconnections between human wellbeing, animal wellbeing, and the wellbeing of the environment. Sustainability challenges should be considered from scientific, regulatory, business, and ethical viewpoints. Sustainability should ideally be integrated into the curriculum rather than treated as a separate topic.

Veterinary Nursing Curriculum

A varied and innovative curriculum is welcomed. However, the following subject areas are suggestive of a curriculum which would ensure the competencies above are covered:

Anaesthesia

Anatomy and physiology

Animal behaviours

Animal nutrition

Biology

Chemistry – fundamentals

Clinical Laboratory Techniques

Communications and research skills

Critical care/emergency veterinary nursing

Diagnostic imaging

Equine nursing

Exotic Animal nursing Farm

Animal nursing

Health and wellbeing

Legal, Ethics and Regulatory affairs

Mathematics/calculations

Parasitology

Pharmacy

Professional Practice

Small animal nursing

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Veterinary nursing- an introduction

Veterinary nursing – surgical nursing and theatre management

Placements

The programme should include placements in each year, delivering a minimum of 850 and ideally 1,000 clinical contact hours over the duration of the programme. Students should have exposure to different types of veterinary practice.

VETERINARY COUNCIL OF IRELAND CODE OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT FOR VETERINARY NURSING

The Council expects as a day one competency that graduates are fully conversant with and follow the Veterinary Council of Ireland Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nursing. Course providers must ensure that the students are familiar with and understand the binding nature of compliance with the Veterinary Council of Ireland Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nursing.

APPENDIX ONE

Veterinary Council of Ireland Competences

1. Follow the Code of Professional Conduct.

2. Practise in accordance with professional, ethical and legal framework. Recognise the moral/ethical issues in patient care.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the legislation governing veterinary practice and data protection.
4. Work in collaboration with patients, clients and colleagues and regulatory authorities.
5. Participate at an appropriate level in multi-disciplinary care
6. Participate in teamwork that respects and uses the contributions of workers in various disciplines
7. Analyse and interpret relevant education / promotion information and use this knowledge to promote health and wellbeing. Use appropriate research and other evidence to underpin decisions that can be justified.
8. Recognise personal and professional limits, seeking assistance where necessary.
9. Demonstrate the exercise of personal responsibility and decision making across a range of situations.
10. Delegate care to others, as appropriate, ensuring effective supervision and monitoring.
11. Recognise potential risk and intervene to prevent, where possible, complications arising.
12. Conduct effective nursing consultations in accordance with the legislation.
13. Promote and monitor health and safety and public protection as well as risk management, in a veterinary setting.
14. Prepare accurate and accessible clinical records and laboratory reports.
15. Carry out reception duties at a registered veterinary premises.
16. Support clients in caring for their animals.
17. Assess priorities in practice and deliver care competently to meet identified need.
18. Formulate and document a plan of care in collaboration with clients in the best interest of the patient.
19. Demonstrate accountability for care delivered, taking into account social, cultural, legal, economic and welfare factors.
20. Participate in the development of an evidence base in clinical practice and understand the importance of such work.

21. Transfer knowledge and skills to a variety of clinical settings and unexpected situations.
22. Demonstrate awareness of biosecurity principles.
23. Handle and restrain patients safely.
24. Perform a clinical examination and record the findings.
25. Deliver nursing care in accordance with best practice and regard for animal welfare.
26. Be aware of the classification routes of administration and restrictions on animal remedies, as well as the potential for adverse reactions.
27. Dispense and administer medication in line with relevant legislation.
28. Interpret signs of pain and distress in animal patients.
29. Provide emergency first aid to animals
30. Understand the need for euthanasia and advise clients as appropriate.
Demonstrate empathy with patients and clients and act as an advocate for them when appropriate.
31. Undertake and document a comprehensive and systematic assessment of the holistic physical, psychological and social needs of patients and clients.
32. Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the subjects underpinning nursing through application to a range of settings, including performance to current occupational standards where available.