



**Dossier of Competencies  
of the  
Accreditation Committee of Veterinary Nurse  
Education (ACOVENE)<sup>©</sup>**

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Leonardo da Vinci



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## Background

### The definition of a European competence

Competency is a multifaceted concept that blends knowledge, skills, and attitudes for effective professional performance, navigating challenges, adapting to change, and handling unforeseen circumstances. This dynamic level of competency evolves continuously over a professional career, dependent on an individual's experience and responsibilities.

Distinguishing between "competence" and "skills" is crucial. For instance, a competence could involve the accurate administration of nursing care, including skills such as assessing and documenting vital signs, attending to patients' grooming and feeding needs. These skills, assessed during clinical placements, serve as evidence of evolving competence. True competence goes beyond technical proficiency, requiring the application of knowledge with confidence and adaptability in diverse contexts and unforeseen scenarios.

The competencies outlined in this document pertain to the expected level and scope for a newly qualified veterinary nurse – denoted as "Day One" competencies. These competencies serve as the minimum standard for veterinary nurses graduating from ACOVENE accredited schools, forming the foundation for various roles within the veterinary profession. Continuous professional development and life-long learning is necessary, with certain roles in the industry demanding additional training and qualifications.

A veterinary nurse achieving day one competence should possess the capability and confidence to independently practice veterinary nursing at a primary care level, while working under the guidance of a veterinary surgeon. The veterinary nurse should be able to judge when it is appropriate to seek assistance from more experienced colleagues.

Numerous methods exist for learning and assessing these competencies, and ACOVENE entrusts the specific details to the schools teaching veterinary nursing, ensuring quality through monitoring and periodic accreditation visits.

## EC1- 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.

### 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, work area.
  - b. Knowledge and explanation of the procedure for reporting adverse incidents and procedures for avoiding them.
  - c. Follow safe practices relating to the dangers in the workplace.
2. Disposal of hazardous/non-hazardous types of waste.
3. Demonstrate knowledge of the organisation and legislation related to a veterinary business.
  - a. Knowledge of legislation affecting veterinary businesses, such as the disposal of clinical waste and safety of medicines.
4. 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.
5. Handle and restrain animal patients safely and humanely.
6. Recognise suspicious signs of possible reportable and zoonotic diseases and take appropriate action, 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.
7. 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.
8. Maintain personal hygiene.

## EC2 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 practicing 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. Understanding risk factors and conditions within a working environment that may cause stress and potential mental health problems.
2. How to 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 how to seek guidance, professional advice and assistance when necessary.
4. Vet nurses must be conscious of their own limitations in order to continue to get appropriate help and guidance, personally and professionally, in order to continue to develop as a professional.
5. Commitment to continuing professional development and to reflect on professional limitations in order to engage in life-long learning, improving work-based learning, performance and overall competence.
6. It is very important that vet nurses have a conscious approach to life-long learning and to contribute to an optimal work-based learning environment. This includes reflecting on own performance but also on the performance of colleagues.
7. Be able to consider the quality of available literature and reference material in order to recognise information with commercial or other forms of bias.
8. Understand and apply the national code of conduct, 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 professional Code of Conduct. This includes being able to reflect on their own practice and implement necessary change.
9. Communicate in a professional manner with colleagues, clients, authorities, the public and others.
10. Be able to perform and collaborate professionally in a multi-disciplinary team thus delivering services of a professional standard.

## EC3 - Carry out veterinary reception duties

### 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 release 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. It is important that the veterinary nurse asks for advice or help from the veterinary surgeon or an experienced veterinary nurse in cases of doubt or uncertainty.
4. Communicating clearly with referring colleagues or referral services ensuring patient histories are received.
5. Maintain health and safety in the waiting room.

## **EC4 - Manage clinical environments for procedures and investigations**

### **About this competence**

This competence concerns the ability of the veterinary nurse to prepare the examination room 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.

### **Competencies**

1. Make sure the examination room is as clean as practicable and 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.
4. Check the animal's condition and that the environmental conditions are suitable for the medical procedure or investigation.
5. Be able to prepare for clinical procedures and to administer medication.

## EC 5 - Providing emergency first aid to animals

### About this competence

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

### Competences

1. Administer first aid and is able to assist in the provision of emergency treatment to animals.
2. Make a rapid risk assessment of the situation of the animal and take appropriate actions for first aid.
3. Stabilise the animal and prevent further deterioration and pain.
4. Know when to call for assistance when dealing with any animal.
5. Know how to obtain all necessary information on the patient from all available sources and cope with incomplete information.
6. Is able to do a physical emergency examination of the animal (including: pulse, respiration, temperature, mucous membranes, CRT - Capillary Refill Time).
  - a. ABCD(E) is a widespread protocol and can be used in doing this examination.
7. Handles emergency patients safely and humanely in the emergency situation whilst also taking care of their own safety and other nearby persons.

## EC6 - Provide and administer nursing care

### About this competence

This competency 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 competency 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 environment, species and clinical condition.
2. Apply principles of bio-security correctly.
3. Create nursing plans for the patients in collaboration with the veterinarian.
4. Monitor the patient and provide appropriate nursing care to patients according to their conditions and in collaboration with the veterinarian.
5. Calculate fluid requirements and administer fluid therapy safely.
6. Evaluate the effectiveness of the nursing care and review the nursing plan together with the veterinarian.
  - 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.
7. Provide clients with the correct information on the condition of their patients in accordance with practice policy.
8. Take care of infection control, including personal and patient hygiene. Know how to apply isolation nursing towards infective and zoonotic disease.

## EC 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 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 the client when there is a need for euthanasia and the options available.

## EC 8 Perform Laboratory Diagnostic Tests

### About this competence

This competency 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.

### Competence

1. Carry out diagnostic tests, including the preparation and sampling 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 test that have been carried out clearly to all relevant parties (veterinarians, nurses, other).

## EC9 - Prepare for diagnostic imaging techniques and conduct radiography on animals

### About this Competence

This competency 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. Prepare 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 ARLA principle (*as low as reasonably achievable*).
  - a. Processing materials could be either chemicals for conventional radiography or digital processing equipment for digital processing.
5. A newly qualified veterinary nurse would not be expected to perform a MRI or CT scan, but still have the knowledge of how and when these diagnostic imaging methods are used.

## EC 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 bio-security correctly, including sterilisation of equipment and disinfection of clothing.
4. Assist the veterinary surgeon during anaesthetic 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.

## EC 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 covers also 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 being able to assess the degree of pain.
3. Inform the owner about the care and treatments needed during the recovery period in a clear and understandable manner.

## EC 12 Assist in the provision of anaesthetics to animals

### About this Competence

This competence covers assisting with the preparation for and provision of safe anaesthesia (induction, maintenance and recovery) to animals and with monitoring progress of anaesthetised animals.

National regulations on the use of anaesthetics have to be taken into consideration.

### Competences:

1. Preparing the animal for anaesthesia.
  - a. Perform pre-anaesthetic checks and procedures necessary to the anaesthetic procedure.
  - b. Prepare and position anaesthetic equipment, materials and gases according to the anaesthetic and veterinary procedures required and in the correct location to support the procedure.
  - c. Comply with regulations and guidelines relating to the use and disposal of anaesthetic 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 surgeon and according to national regulations.
  - b. Monitor and record the animal carefully and bring any indications of problems to the attention of the veterinary surgeon.
  - c. The veterinary nurse must take into account the animal's condition.
  - d. Assess pain and alert the veterinary surgeon.
3. Reduce and stop the anaesthetic procedure at the correct stages of the surgical procedure.
  - a. Disconnect the animal carefully from anaesthetic equipment, materials and gases.
4. Monitor the patient during all stages of recovery from anaesthesia.

## EC 13 Dispense and administer medication

### About this competency

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. Take into account the clients' needs and any health and safety issues associated with the medicines used.
3. When using or dispensing antimicrobial agents, veterinary nurses must be aware of the risk of antimicrobial resistance and instruct the owners/clients accordingly.
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 and procedures for reporting.

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