



**Dossier of Competences
of the
Accreditation Committee of Veterinary Nurse
Education (ACOVENE)®**

Fourth Edition June 2026



ACO VENE

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Fourth edition approved ACO VENE board June 2026

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ACO VENE was established in 2007 through the DASVENT Transfer of Innovation project, funded with support from the European Commission.



Education and Culture

Leonardo da Vinci



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Background

The definition of a European competence

Competence 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 competence 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.

Competence also includes the ability to apply knowledge, skills and professional attitudes within evolving professional contexts, including public health, sustainability and technological developments.

Day One Competence

The competences outlined in this document pertain to the expected level and scope for a newly qualified veterinary nurse – denoted as "Day One" competences. These competences 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 perform and take responsibility for routine veterinary nursing tasks 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.

Veterinary nurses should recognise their role within the One health framework, acknowledging the interconnection between animal, human and environmental health.

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

Scope of practice

Veterinary Nurses operate within a defined scope of practice. The degree of delegation, autonomy, and supervision by a veterinary surgeon is determined by national legislation and regulatory frameworks and therefore varies across country jurisdictions.



EC1- Health and safety

About this competence

This competence sets the standards

- to promote, monitor and maintain health and safety in the veterinary setting (in accordance with 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, materials and the working environment.
 - 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. Support antimicrobial stewardship by handling and administering medicines appropriately and providing client instruction in accordance with veterinary direction and current guidance.
3. Segregate and dispose of hazardous and non-hazardous waste in accordance with legislation, environmental sustainability and biosecurity principles.
4. 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 safe use of medicines.
5. Maintain good standards of health and safety.
 - a. Respond appropriately to accidents causing personal injury or adverse health effects.
6. Handle and restrain animal patients safely and humanely.
7. Recognise suspicious signs of possible reportable and zoonotic diseases and take appropriate action in accordance with appropriate health and safety and biosecurity requirements.
 - a. Identify clinical signs, causes, and transmission routes (including vectors) of common zoonotic, food-borne, and transboundary diseases.
 - b. Recognise risks associated with emerging infectious diseases and respond in accordance with biosecurity and reporting procedures.



- c. Apply basic One Health principles by recognising the interrelationship between animal, human, and environmental health within the clinical setting.
8. Apply principles of biosecurity 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.



EC2 Developing personal performance and maintaining working relationships

About this Competence

This competence sets the standard for professional behaviour, communication, and working relationships within veterinary practice, including the maintenance of personal and workplace wellbeing.

It includes:

- professional conduct, responsibility, and scope of practice, including awareness of stress, mental health factors, and ethical responsibilities within the veterinary profession;
- effective communication and teamwork, including collaboration with colleagues, clients, and other professionals in routine and challenging situations;
- reflection, lifelong learning, and evidence-based practice, supporting continuous professional development and improvement of individual and team performance; and
- contribution to a supportive and psychologically safe working environment, recognising factors affecting wellbeing such as stress, compassion fatigue, and emotional burden.

Competences

1. Professional behaviour, responsibility & scope of practice
 - a. Understanding risk factors and conditions within a working environment that may cause stress and potential mental health problems.
 - b. Recognise symptoms of prolonged stress and mental health issues in order to know and understand when and how to seek help.
 - c. Recognise personal and professional limitations and how to seek guidance, professional advice and assistance when necessary.
 - d. Veterinary nurses must be conscious of their own limitations and seek appropriate support and guidance, both personally and professionally, to continue to develop as a professional.
 - e. Understand and apply the national code of conduct, rules and legislation and be able to reflect and discuss professional ethics.
 - i. 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.
 - f. Veterinary Nurses operate within a defined scope of practice. The degree of delegation, autonomy, and supervision by a veterinary surgeon is determined by national legislation and regulatory frameworks and therefore varies across country jurisdictions.



2. Communication, teamwork & professional interaction
 - a. Communicate in a professional manner with colleagues, clients, authorities, the public and others.
 - b. Be able to perform and collaborate professionally in a multi-disciplinary team thus delivering services of a professional standard.
 - c. Maintain professional communication in challenging situations, understand principles of conflict resolution.
 - d. Demonstrate inclusive and respectful communication in diverse professional environments (cultural competence).
3. Reflection, lifelong learning & professional development
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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.
 - c. Be able to consider the quality of available literature and reference material in order to recognise information with commercial or other forms of bias.
4. Workplace wellbeing, resilience & psychologically safe environments
 - a. Contribute to a supportive and psychologically safe working environment.
 - b. Recognise factors affecting workplace wellbeing, including stress, compassion fatigue, and emotional burden, and respond appropriately within professional and ethical boundaries.



EC3 - Carry out veterinary reception duties

About this competence

This competence is about carrying out general veterinary reception duties. It covers making appointments, receiving clients and their animals for appointments, processing payments for veterinary services, admitting and discharging animals and performing associated and other administrative tasks.

This competence is important for maintaining effective client communication and professional relationships with clients, referring practices, and the public, thereby supporting confidence in veterinary services.

Competences

1. Perform administrative reception duties to contribute to an efficiently run workplace.
2. Admit and discharge patients ensuring accurate and efficient communication and transfer of clinical and non-clinical information and providing appropriate client advice regarding patient care.
3. Perform appropriate triage with telephone and digital 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. Communicate clearly and professionally with clients, colleagues, and referring practices ensuring patient histories are received.
5. Manage routine and difficult client interactions, support complaints handling procedures, in accordance with practice policy.
6. Communicate in a respectful and culturally aware manner.
7. Maintain health and safety in reception and waiting areas
8. Apply principles of confidentiality and data protection (i.e. GDPR) in all client interactions and record handling.
9. Recognise fear, anxiety, and stress in animals in reception and waiting areas and respond appropriately using low-stress handling principles where possible, escalating concerns when necessary.



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, ensuring appropriate environmental conditions, and preparing and keeping the patient calm so that veterinary procedures and investigations can be carried out safely, efficiently, and with minimal stress to the animal.

Competences

1. Prepare the clinical environment by ensuring the examination room is clean, organised, and ready to receive clients and patients.
2. Manage clinical materials and supplies to ensure adequate availability of equipment and consumables, preventing shortages or unnecessary surplus.
3. Handle and restrain animal patients safely and humanely, applying appropriate low-stress handling techniques to minimise fear, anxiety, and stress during preparation and procedures.
4. Assess the suitability of the clinical environment and patient condition prior to procedures or investigations, ensuring environmental conditions support patient safety and procedural effectiveness.
5. Prepare for clinical procedures and administration of medication.
6. Use appropriate operational checklists to support safety and readiness.



EC 5 - Providing emergency first aid to animals

About this competence

This competence is about the veterinary nurse assisting with and providing emergency first aid to animals, in accordance with relevant legislation and professional guidelines.

It includes rapid assessment, provision of first aid, and support of veterinary intervention in emergency situations while ensuring the safety of the animal, personnel, and others present.

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. Perform basic emergency clinical assessment, including pulse, respiration, temperature, mucous membranes, and capillary refill time (CRT), using recognised emergency protocols (e.g. ABCD(E)) approach).
7. Handle emergency patients safely and humanely, applying appropriate low-stress handling techniques while maintaining their own safety, safety for the animal, staff, and others present.
8. Recognise fear, anxiety, and stress in emergency patients and apply appropriate immediate handling and environmental strategies to minimise distress during emergency intervention.
9. Maintain awareness of infection risk in emergency situations, applying appropriate basic biosecurity measures to reduce cross-contamination risk during emergency care.
10. Assess and manage pain in emergency patients using appropriate pain assessment tools and apply principles of effective pain management to support patient welfare.



EC6 - Provide and administer nursing care

About this competence

This competence covers the provision of nursing care to animals with a range of medical and surgical conditions. It includes the preparation and management of patient accommodation and the correct application of biosecurity principles.

It also encompasses the planning, delivery, and evaluation of nursing care plans for patients, in collaboration with the veterinarian, including those undergoing medical and post-surgical treatment.

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 and ensure they are documented in the clinical record.
4. Monitor the patient and provide appropriate nursing care to patients according to their conditions and in collaboration with the veterinarian.
5. Recognise indicators of fear, anxiety, and stress and apply appropriate handling, environmental, and nursing strategies to minimise distress.
6. Assess and monitor pain using validated scoring systems and contribute to multimodal pain management in collaboration with the veterinarian.
7. Apply welfare assessment principles, including the use of recognised frameworks (e.g. Five Domains), in the management of hospitalised patients
8. Calculate fluid requirements and administer fluid therapy safely.
9. 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.
10. Provide clients with the correct information on the condition of their patients in accordance with practice policy.
11. 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 through communication, education, discharge advice, and ongoing guidance provided during veterinary services.

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.
6. Communicate effectively with clients in a range of situations, including difficult conversations, using professional, inclusive, and culturally competent communication approaches.
7. Support clients in understanding clinical condition, including recognising pain and welfare assessment frameworks.
8. Support clinical care under veterinary direction, which may include sample collection and pre-analytical handling, wound care and bandaging in accordance with treatment plans.
9. Demonstrate awareness of professional boundaries when communicating with clients, ensuring clarity on veterinary versus veterinary nurse responsibilities in accordance with scope of practice guidance.



EC 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 ensures that equipment and materials are used safely and appropriately, applies basic quality control procedures to support the accuracy and reliability of results, and recognises factors that may affect test validity.

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.

They ensure that samples are appropriately stored and traceable and that results are correctly recorded, including integration into clinical records where applicable, and communicate the results.

Competences

1. Maintain equipment (cleaning, replacement, service or repair).
2. 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.
3. Collect or assist with collection of all types of biological material samples (blood, urine, faeces, other).
4. Label all collected samples correctly and store or preserve them accordingly, depending on the scheduled diagnostic tests, ensure traceability.
5. 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, including applying basic quality control procedures.
6. Carry out diagnostic tests, including the preparation and sampling and the maintenance of equipment and materials.
7. Recognise abnormal or unexpected results and report these appropriately to the veterinary surgeon.
8. Communicate the results of test that have been carried out clearly to all relevant parties (veterinarians, nurses, other), and ensure results are appropriately recorded in clinical records.
9. Prepare, package and dispatch samples to external laboratories, and manage the receipt and handling of external laboratory reports.



EC9 - 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, radiation protection principles 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, ensuring images are of diagnostic quality and appropriately stored and recorded.

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. This includes supporting sedated patients in accordance with the relevant national scope of practice.
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*), including the use of hands-free techniques where appropriate.
 - a. Processing materials could be either chemicals for conventional radiography or digital processing equipment for digital processing.
5. Ensure radiographic images and associated data are appropriately processed, stored and recorded, including use of digital imaging systems where applicable.
6. 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, including basic patient preparation and safety considerations.



EC 10 Prepare for veterinary surgical procedures

About this Competence

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, while applying aseptic techniques and ensuring the safety of patients and staff.

Competences

1. Be able to prepare the preparation room, the surgical theatre and the patient, and recognise and report incidents, errors or non-conformities in the surgical environment in accordance with established procedures.
2. Be able to select and prepare the right surgical equipment and materials for surgical procedures and successful operation, including checking completeness and functionality and applying surgical safety procedures such as checklists and instrument counts where appropriate.
3. Apply principles of biosecurity correctly, including sterilisation of equipment and disinfection of clothing and handle, segregate and dispose of clinical waste appropriately to minimise risk and environmental impact.
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 competence

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
- monitoring the patient under anaesthesia or sedation
- assisting with the surgical procedure itself
- monitoring and assisting the recovery of the patient after such procedures,

ensuring patient safety and welfare

Competences

1. Intra-operative assistance

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. Recovery and patient care

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. Client communication

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, including the use of appropriate monitoring equipment, ensuring patient safety and welfare at all times.

National regulations on the use of anaesthetics and scope of practice for veterinary nurses 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 using appropriate monitoring equipment 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 pain using appropriate methods, including evaluated pain scoring systems 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, recording parameters and recognising and reporting any complications or concerns to the veterinary surgeon.



EC 13 Dispense and administer medication

About this competence

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, applying antimicrobial stewardship principles.
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, in accordance with reporting requirements where applicable.
6. The veterinary nurse should be aware of any national Veterinary Medicines Regulations and procedures for reporting and support responsible prescribing by the veterinary surgeon.

