



Veterinary Council of Ireland

Consultation on accreditation standards for programmes of education in Veterinary Nursing

2025

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Background:

As the statutory regulator for veterinary medicine and veterinary nursing in Ireland, the Veterinary Council ('the Council') is entrusted in law as the competent authority for the accreditation of programmes of veterinary medicine and veterinary nursing in Ireland. Graduates of such Veterinary Council accredited programmes are eligible to join the Register of Veterinary Practitioners and Register of Veterinary Nursing in Ireland. It is 5 years since our last review of accreditation standards for programmes of undergraduate education. We welcome feedback on the draft standards of accreditation from stakeholders in our periodic review.

Accreditation standards ensure professionalism in the practise of veterinary medicine and veterinary nursing in Ireland, to the benefit of animal health and welfare, public health, and food safety in the public interest.

In anticipation of growth in veterinary education, and the prospect of new education providers, programmes, and delivery models, the Council is reviewing its current standards for accreditation to ensure these reflect best practice and align with the One Health approach, recognising the important interconnectivity between animal, human and environmental health. The Council considers stakeholder input essential to ensure VCI standards meet evolving professional needs and societal expectations of the veterinary professions.

Key themes:

One of the main objectives in reviewing the Veterinary Medicine and Veterinary Nursing Accreditation Standards is to support development of a rigorous, student-centered, approach to delivery of education, with greater emphasis on the role of clinical training in instilling the necessary competencies.

Proposed key changes include:

- Programmes in Veterinary Nursing will be required to be at a minimum NFQ Level 6 and include at least 850 clinical practice hours to enable access to the Register.
- Additional requirements in relation to course providers to ensure students receive adequate exposure across animal types, with defined requirements for student practical clinical experience and a stronger emphasis on case variety.
- In addition to reinforcing existing standards around mental health, wellbeing, professional skills and ethics, standards have been expanded to include emerging topics such as Artificial Intelligence, research and self-learning.

How to submit feedback:

Consultation period: **1 July to 11 September 2025.**

The Council welcomes written submissions to info@vci.ie from any party on the proposed revised accreditation standards for programmes of veterinary medicine and veterinary nursing.

All feedback and submissions received as part of this public consultation will be collated and used to inform future revisions of these proposed standards of accreditation.

Accreditation Standards for Veterinary Nursing

Following a detailed comparative analysis of the **accreditation standards** and **Day One Competencies** (Available [here](#) and [here](#)) of major international accrediting bodies - including the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons ([RCVS](#)), the Accreditation Committee for Veterinary Nurse Education ([ACOVENE](#)), and the Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia ([VNCA](#)) - the VCI has updated its accreditation standards with a new framework of 10 areas designed to reflect the needs and future direction of the Veterinary Nursing education and the profession itself. [Available here: 2025 Draft Accreditation Standards for Veterinary Nursing](#)

Veterinary Nursing is a statutorily regulated profession in Ireland, whereas in some European countries, vet nursing regulation is not yet founded in law. The Day One Competencies listed in the framework below reflect the particular roles and responsibilities of Veterinary Nurses in the Irish context, which differ from those in operation in other jurisdictions. A brief summary of proposed key updates in the accreditation standards for Veterinary Nursing is included below:

Framework Area	Key updates to VCI Standards for Veterinary Nursing 2025
Area 1. Legislation, Laws and Ethics	Added emphasis on ensuring veterinary nurses are trained to support veterinarians and ensure competent care, with specific mention of technical skills, ethical practice, and lifelong learning.
Area 2. Finances	Added emphasis on ensuring training facilities meet the needs of veterinary nursing education and enable adequate access to equipment and learning.
Area 3. Curriculum	Minimum NFQ Level 6 for access to the Register, with requirement for 850 hours of clinical practice. Added emphasis on practical skills in areas such as patient care, anaesthesia monitoring, and laboratory techniques.
Area 4. Facilities and equipment	Added emphasis on ensuring that teaching facilities, access to animals, learning environments and clinical equipment are fully appropriate for practical training in veterinary nursing tasks.
Area 5. Animal resources	Added emphasis on ensuring sufficient exposure to routine and emergency nursing scenarios, with an emphasis on hands-on experience in patient care.
Area 6. Learning resources	Requirement to ensure access to veterinary nursing simulation models and resources and databases focused on veterinary nursing knowledge.
Area 7. Student admission, progression	Requirement to provide support systems, including welfare programs for stress management and work-life balance.
Area 8. Student assessment	Requirement to ensure exams are practical and provide constructive feedback tailored to nursing roles.
Area 9. Teaching and support staff	New requirement to include practicing veterinary nurses as educators and increased focus on continuing education in nursing techniques.
Area 10. Research and CVE	Requirement to ensure applied research in veterinary nursing is encouraged and nursing-specific CPD programmes are provided to support lifelong learning.

VCI Day One Competencies for Veterinary Nursing

1. Health and Safety:

- a) Promote, monitor, and maintain health and safety in the workplace. Identify health and safety risks in relation to people, equipment, and materials in the workplace.
- b) Prepare a safety statement for the veterinary practice.
- c) Disposal of hazardous/non-hazardous types of waste.
- d) Demonstrate knowledge of the organisation and legislation necessary to to operate a veterinary business, such as radiation, the disposal of clinical waste and safety of medicines.
- e) Maintain good standards of health and safety, and be able to deal with accidents which cause personal injury and adverse changes in an individual's health which puts them at risk.
- f) Handle and restrain animal patients safely and humanely.
- g) Recognise signs of reportable and zoonotic diseases, ensuring that the veterinary practitioner is informed and that appropriate measures are taken, including observing appropriate health and safety recommendations.
- h) 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.
- i) Apply principles of biosecurity correctly, including sterilisation of equipment and disinfection of clothing. Maintain high standards of biosecurity to minimize risk of contamination, cross infection, and accumulation of pathogens in veterinary premises and the wider environment.
- j) Maintain personal hygiene.
- k) 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.
- l) Promote and monitor health and safety and public protection as well as risk management, in a veterinary setting.
- m) Recognise potential risk of, and intervene to prevent where possible, complications arising.

2. Personal performance

- a) Understand risk factors and conditions within a working environment that may cause stress and potential mental health issues,
- 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 know how to seek guidance, professional advice, and assistance when necessary.
- d) Be able to critically evaluate literature and conduct independent research.
- e) Understand and apply the VCI Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses, rules, and legislation, and be able to reflect and discuss professional ethics.
- f) Communicate in a professional manner with colleagues, clients, authorities, the public and others.
- g) Be able to perform and collaborate professionally in a multi-disciplinary team to deliver services of a professional standard.
- h) Recognise personal and professional limits, seeking assistance where necessary.
- i) Demonstrate the exercise of personal responsibility and decision making across a range of situations.
- j) Assess priorities in practice and deliver care competently to meet identified need.
- k) Demonstrate accountability for care delivered, taking into account social, cultural, legal, economic and welfare factors.
- l) Practise in accordance with professional, ethical and legal framework. Recognise moral/ethical issues in patient care.
- m) Participate in teamwork that respects and uses the contributions of workers in various disciplines
- n) Participate at an appropriate level in multi-disciplinary care.
- o) Work in collaboration with patients, clients and colleagues and regulatory authorities.
- p) Delegate care to others, as appropriate, ensuring effective supervision and monitoring.

3. Communication & Records

- a) Contribute to an efficiently run workplace and perform administrative reception duties in such a way that clients and employer are satisfied.
- b) Admit and discharge patients ensuring efficient transfer of information to, and from, clients and advising clients on care for their animals in an efficient manner.
- c) Perform appropriate triage with telephone consultations determining the urgency of any given situation and setting up appointments accordingly.
- d) Communicate clearly with referring colleagues or referral services ensuring
- e) patient histories are received.
- f) Maintain health and safety in the waiting room.
- g) Demonstrate knowledge of the legislation governing veterinary practice and data protection.
- h) Prepare accurate and accessible clinical records and laboratory reports.

4. Clinical environments

- a) Make sure the examination room is as clean as practicable and is ready to receive clients.
- b) Manage the supply of veterinary materials to ensure no shortage or surplus of necessary materials.
- c) Handle and restrain animal patients safely and humanely using best practice techniques and restraint aids.
- d) Investigate the animal's condition and ensure that environmental conditions are suitable for the medical procedure or investigation.
- e) Be able to prepare for clinical procedures and administration of medication.

5. First aid

- a) Make a rapid risk assessment of the situation of the animal and take appropriate actions for first aid.
- b) Stabilise the animal and prevent further deterioration and pain under the direction of the veterinary practitioner.
- c) Know when to call for assistance when dealing with any animal.
- d) Recognise when information on the patient is incomplete.
- e) Be able to do a physical emergency examination of the animal (may include assessment of shock and recognition of its stages, such as assessing pulse, respiration, temperature, mucous membranes, CRT - Capillary Refill Time).
- f) Handle patients safely and humanely in an emergency situation whilst also taking care of personal safety and the safety of nearby persons.

6. Nursing care

- a) Prepare accommodation suitable for the patient, taking into account the environment, species, age, and clinical condition.
- b) Create nursing care plans for patients (in collaboration with colleagues or the veterinarian as appropriate).
- c) Deliver nursing care in accordance with best practice and with regard for animal welfare.
- d) Undertake and document a comprehensive and systematic assessment of the holistic, physical, psychological and social needs of patients and clients.
- e) Monitor animal patients, record findings and provide appropriate nursing care to patients according to their conditions (in collaboration with colleagues or the veterinarian as appropriate).
- f) Perform a clinical examination and record the findings.
- g) Interpret signs of pain and distress in animal patients.
- h) Calculate fluid requirements and administer fluid therapy safely and effectively under the direction of the veterinarian.
- i) Evaluate effectiveness of 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 appropriate action.
 - b. Alert veterinary staff to problems or complications that arise concerning the care of the patient.
 - c. Interpret patient progression/signs of recovery.
- j) Provide clients with the correct information on the condition of animal patients in accordance with practice policy
- k) Formulate and document a plan of care in collaboration with clients in the best interest of the patient.
- l) Manage infection control, including personal and patient hygiene.
- m) Know how to apply isolation nursing towards infective and zoonotic disease.
- n) Transfer knowledge and skills to a variety of clinical settings and unexpected situations.
- o) Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the subjects underpinning nursing through application to a range of settings, including performance to current occupational standards where available.
- p) Participate in the development of an evidence base in clinical practice and understand the importance of such work.

7. Supporting Clients

- a) Inform and instruct clients in the care of their animals, in addition to offering relevant advice and guidance. This may include how to medicate, exercise, and give general care ensuring owner compliance when discharging animals. Also includes explaining treatment regimens advised by the veterinarian ensuring owner compliance and understanding.
- b) Inform and advise clients on preventive medicine appropriate to species. Accessing health records will aid in giving appropriate advice.
- c) Inform and advise clients on nutritional needs and specialised nutritional diets for their animals.
- d) Provide veterinary materials to clients with professional advice and guidance in the use and disposal of these materials.
- e) May include medication, specialised diets, other consumables and in accordance with national legislation.
- f) Understand the need for euthanasia and advise clients as appropriate. Support and empathise with the client when there is a need for euthanasia.

8. Diagnostic tests

- a) Carry out diagnostic tests, including preparation and maintenance of equipment and materials.
- b) Maintain equipment (cleaning, replacement, service, or repair).
- c) 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.
- d) Collect or assist with collection of all types of biological material samples (blood, urine, faeces, other).
- e) Label collected samples correctly and store or preserve samples correctly.

- f) Be able to use analytical equipment available in the clinic/practice in an appropriate manner to ensure results are reliable and the equipment is not damaged.
- g) Communicate the results of tests clearly to all relevant parties (veterinarians, nurses, other).

9. Diagnostic imaging

- a) Prepare equipment and materials for various diagnostic imaging techniques.
- b) Maintain the equipment and identify faults.
- c) Position the animal for diagnostic imaging techniques efficiently and with minimal stress to the animal.
- d) Take and process radiographic images of high diagnostic quality, ensuring the safe use of equipment in accordance with current national legislation, the comfort of the animal during the process, the safety of the animal and human safety, following the ALARA principle (as low as reasonably achievable). Understand correct use of materials, either chemicals for conventional radiography or, increasingly, digital processing equipment for digital processing.
- e) Know how and when these diagnostic imaging methods are used.
- f) Prepare equipment and materials for various diagnostic imaging techniques.
- g) Maintain the equipment and identify faults.
- h) Position the animal for diagnostic imaging techniques efficiently and with minimal stress to the animal.

10: Prepare for surgical procedures

- a) Be able to prepare the preparation room, the surgical theatre, and the patient.
- b) Be able to select and prepare the correct equipment and materials for surgical procedures
- c) Apply principles of biosecurity correctly, including sterilisation of equipment and disinfection of clothing.
- d) Assist the veterinary surgeon during surgical procedures.
- e) Be able to transfer anaesthetised animal safely into the operating theatre. Place and restrain the patient appropriately using suitable restraining equipment and methods.

11: Assisting the surgeon

- a) 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.
- b) Be able to deliver the necessary post-operative care for the patient, taking into account the species, condition of the animal and the surgical procedure performed. Monitor and record animal recovery appropriately and be able to assess the degree of pain and any expected complication following surgery.
- c) Inform the owner about the care needed during the recovery period in a clear and understandable manner.

12: Assisting with anaesthesia

- a) Preparing the animal for anaesthesia. Comply with regulations and guidelines relating to the use and disposal of anaesthetic equipment, materials, and gases.
- b) Administering and maintaining anaesthetics to the animal thereby assisting the veterinary surgeon during surgery and other procedures. This must be under supervision of the veterinary practitioner and according to the Code of Professional Conduct. Monitor and record clinical signs carefully and bring any indications of problems to the attention of the veterinary surgeon. The veterinary nurse must consider the animal's condition.
- c) Reduce and stop the anaesthetic procedure at the correct stages of the surgical procedure. Disconnect the animal carefully from anaesthetic equipment, materials, and gases.
- d) Monitor the patient during all stages of recovery from anaesthesia.

13: Medication

- a) Dispense and administer medicines correctly and responsibly in accordance with veterinary surgeon direction, legislation, and latest guidance.
- b) Consider patients' needs and any health and safety issues associated with the medicines used.
- c) Understand the risk of antimicrobial resistance.
- d) Take into account patient needs in terms of the administration route of the medication.
- e) Be aware of suspected adverse reactions and alert the veterinary surgeon.
- f) Be aware of national Veterinary Medicines Regulations.
- g) Be aware of the classification routes of administration and restrictions on animal remedies, and the potential for adverse reactions.