



# RCVS EMS Policy and Guidance 2023



## Extra Mural Studies Policy

Extra Mural Studies (EMS) is a part of students' overall clinical education, and placements are a vital component of the veterinary degree as they provide a unique opportunity for students to gain valuable hands-on experience and practice skills acquired during the veterinary programme, in a further range of 'real workplace learning' contexts. Students are encouraged to identify their own intended learning outcomes for EMS, and undertake EMS placements in areas which complement and enhance their learning and which they feel will benefit them most.

Unlike Intra Mural Rotations (IMR), during which the core teaching of the veterinary programme is delivered formally, the learning which takes place on EMS placements is experiential, focused on the students understanding and applying knowledge and skills from core teaching into a range of workplace contexts. This experiential learning is highly valuable for students as they are able to augment the training they have already received with real-life, hands-on experience that cannot necessarily be captured as part of the curriculum, to help them develop into capable and confident veterinary surgeons. It is also an opportunity to give students further experience in decision making, team working and communication, as well as offer an insight into how finances work in practices away from an academic setting.

EMS placements offer an important insight and introduction into the professional career of a veterinary surgeon, and give vital experience to students before they graduate. EMS also represents the beginning of a life-long cycle of continuing their own professional development outside of a traditional teaching context, which continues after graduation and throughout their career.

Students will, of course, acquire further knowledge and skills whilst on EMS placements. However, all Day One Competences must be covered by the Clinical Education delivered by the University, and EMS placements should not be used to address gaps within core Clinical Education.

## Policy

1. A total of 38 weeks of EMS must be completed over the course of the veterinary degree programme before students are able to graduate.
2. Of these, 12 weeks must be devoted to pre-clinical/animal husbandry EMS, to be completed throughout the pre-clinical years of the programme (usually 1st and 2nd years, however this could be up to the 3rd year in extended or intercalated programmes). Where appropriate for the curriculum model, some clinical EMS may be completed before the third year. However, in these cases, all PCEMS for the species relevant to the placement being undertaken must have been completed to ensure the safety of the student.
3. The remaining 26 weeks must be undertaken as clinical EMS, to be completed regularly over the final 3 years of the course (or clinical years) before graduation, with normally a recommended minimum of 6 weeks to be completed per year.

## Pre-clinical/Animal handling (AH) EMS – 12 weeks

**Pre-clinical, or animal husbandry EMS takes place during the earlier years of the veterinary degree course to allow students to gain further experience in animal husbandry and handling of animals in all common domestic species, in authentic, working environments where animals may be less used to being handled than in academic settings. Students can also begin to develop their professional skills with clients and animal owners.**

4. 12 weeks is the minimum amount of pre-clinical/AHEMS required, and students are permitted to carry out further weeks should they wish and be able to, separate to the 26 weeks of clinical EMS.
5. Of the 12 weeks required, RCVS stipulates that at least 1 week of pre-clinical/AHEMS must take place in each of the main three disciplines: equine, farm animal, and small animal. The students intended learning outcomes should be agreed between tutor, student and placement provider before the placement commences, and reflected upon afterwards.
6. It is important for students to be thoroughly briefed on the health and safety aspects of handling animals; therefore students must only undertake pre-clinical/AHEMS in areas where they have already received sufficient teaching and training.
7. The placements can take place in any order, and more than 1 week can take place in a certain area or species domain.
8. Universities are able to consider granting exemptions on a very exceptional basis (for example for students who have considerable animal handling experience gained on a previous course at tertiary level, or through extensive and relevant work experience). However, any time saved by allowing exemption in one particular area should be spent on developing skills in other areas, or with other species.
9. The remaining weeks of pre-clinical/AHEMS placements can be undertaken in any areas where a student has a particular interest, or where they feel it would be of benefit to them.

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10. All pre-clinical/AHEMS placements must take place in person with the student attending on-site. This is to ensure that the student will be directly involved with handling animals and observing animal behaviours during the placement.
11. All pre-clinical/AHEMS placements must directly involve the student in a way that helps to broaden their experience based on the knowledge and skills they have already acquired during core teaching.
12. It is suggested that placements should usually take place within an environment that is outside of the usual teaching environment of the veterinary school.
13. Any placements where a student is not directly involved in handling animals and / or observing animal behaviours for a significant majority of the time spent there, would not be considered appropriate pre-clinical EMS.

## Clinical EMS – 12 weeks

**Clinical EMS placements are where students are able to further develop their clinical, technical and professional skills that they have been taught in IMR, through experiential learning in real workplace contexts. Clinical EMS placements will take place regularly during the clinical years of the veterinary programme, prior to graduation, with a minimum of six weeks completed per year.**

14. Unlike pre-clinical/AHEMS, there is no stipulation as to how many weeks are required for each species or placement type, and students are encouraged to undertake clinical EMS in the areas they feel would interest them and benefit them most. The students intended learning aims and objectives should be agreed with their tutor and placement provider prior to the placement taking place.
15. 26 weeks is the minimum amount of clinical EMS required, and students are free to carry out further weeks should they wish and be able to.
16. Students should only be gaining further experience on clinical EMS placements in clinical skills that they have already been taught through IMR. It is acknowledged that students may learn new techniques and acquire further knowledge whilst on clinical EMS placements, however the responsibility of formally teaching students must still remain with the veterinary school. Clinical EMS must complement what students have learned on IMR, and not act as an extension of it.
17. Clinical EMS must take place in person, with the student attending on-site getting “hands-on”, direct clinical experience with animals. This is to ensure that the student will have the opportunity to further develop the skills they have learned through core teaching, during the EMS placement.
18. Normally clinical EMS placements would be expected to last at least two weeks, however it is recognised that some placements of a certain nature may not require more than one week.
19. Long term research placements can count towards the clinical EMS requirement at the discretion of the school, if a student has an interest in entering the research field, for example.
20. It is suggested that clinical EMS placements should usually take place within

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an environment that is outside of the usual teaching environment of the veterinary school and its partners.

21. All clinical EMS placements must directly involve the student in a way that helps to broaden their experience based on the knowledge and skills they have already acquired during core teaching.

## Professional EMS

22. As part of clinical EMS, up to 2 weeks of “professional EMS” can be allowed for, which could be work placements that may not necessarily be clinically based or be directly involving animals. For example, the following types of placement can be permitted for “professional EMS”:
- Administrative placements with veterinary bodies and/or government;
  - Veterinary business placements;
  - Veterinary diagnostic laboratory placements;
  - Veterinary Public Health placements;
  - Named Veterinary Surgeon placements.
- (This list is not exhaustive)***
23. More than 2 weeks of professional EMS is encouraged at the school’s discretion if a student has a specific and genuine interest in gaining further experience in a non-clinical setting.
24. Professional EMS is not a mandatory requirement as part of clinical EMS. ●



## Guidance on RCVS EMS Policy

**This guidance should be read in conjunction with the preceding RCVS EMS Policy section.**

### Sign-off

1. The RCVS EMS Policy must be implemented by the veterinary school, and the school will have the final sign off on all EMS placements. Where flexibility is allowed for within the policy, it is up to the veterinary school to make the final decision on what is and is not accepted for EMS placements.

### Number of weeks

2. As stated in the policy, the requirement for completion of EMS is 38 weeks: 12 weeks pre-clinical, or animal handling (AHEMS), EMS; and 26 weeks clinical EMS. This is the minimum requirement – students can obtain further weeks if they are able to.
3. The length of a week should primarily be based on the providers' working week. For example, if a placement provider has asked the student to be present from Monday to Saturday, then that would constitute one week. The vet school will always have the final sign off on what constitutes a "week" of EMS, and it is advised that common sense and discretion is applied.
4. It is accepted that some weeks' placements may be longer than others. The minimum amount of time for a working week would be expected to be 5 days. Exceptions can be made for bank holidays.
5. Placements may not necessarily have to take place over consecutive days. For example, a student could attend a placement over consecutive weekends which could count towards the requirement. Again, in this instance the school would need to make the final judgement over how many "weeks" the placement would count for based on the amount of days attended.
6. Schools are encouraged to make allowances for students' absence if a placement may fall outside the time of a usual university week. For example, if a placement finishes on a Sunday night and a student may be unable to travel back in time for a Monday lecture, they should be excused.

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## International EMS placements

7. The RCVS EMS does not have any stipulations about international EMS policies. Both pre-clinical and clinical EMS placements can take place overseas at the discretion of the individual schools. Schools should ensure that the correct insurance arrangements are in place before any international placements take place.

## Pre-Clinical EMS

### Species requirement

8. The RCVS EMS Policy states that at least 1 week of pre-clinical/AHEMS must take place in each of the three main disciplines: equine; farm animal; and small animal. This is to ensure that students gain some further exposure to animals across each of the main areas.
9. Within each species area, there is no specific stipulation as to which species the placement should be centred around.
10. Students can spend more than 1 week in any of the stipulated disciplines if they wish.
11. Schools may implement their own species requirements in addition or further to the RCVS Policy to make up for any of the remaining 9 weeks, but in doing so it should be made clear to the students that this is a specific requirement of the school itself.
12. RCVS does not stipulate any specific order of discipline or species that placements need to be completed in. However, schools may implement their own timetables based on the curriculum.

## Types of pre-clinical/AHEMS placement

13. RCVS does not stipulate which placements would be “accepted” for pre-clinical/AHEMS. As stated above, it is up to the individual veterinary school to give the final sign-off on which placements will be accepted for pre-clinical/AHEMS.
14. RCVS would not expect schools to be allowing any e-learning type placement for pre-clinical/AHEMS.

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15. RCVS would not expect schools to be allowing any type of placement where the student is not directly involved in animal handling.
16. RCVS would encourage the majority of pre-clinical/AHEMS placements to take place off-campus and away from university farms or hospitals, or any locations where IMR is delivered, to allow students to gain further experience outside of the veterinary school environment. However, on-campus placements are allowed for within the policy.

## Clinical EMS

### Species requirement

17. There is no stipulation on species requirement from RCVS for clinical EMS. This is to encourage more freedom for the individual student and tutor to be able to identify both areas in which further development may be needed, but also to give individual students the ability to hone down a particular area of interest themselves.
18. Vet schools are free to interpret the policy by implementing their own species requirements, however in doing so, it should be made clear to the students that this is a specific requirement of the school itself.

### Length of placement

19. The policy states that clinical placements would be expected to last at least 2 weeks. This is to allow time for students to get a better feel of the environment and cases seen whilst on placement, as well as being able to give the provider more time to be able to offer more effective mentorship and guidance. However, this is not a strict requirement, and placements of 1 week can be allowed for, and this should be down to the school's discretion.
20. There is no maximum limit to a placement length. However, it is recognised that the length of any particular placement would likely be influenced by a combination of any, or all, of the schools' timetables and curricula; availability of the provider; and the student's own time and availability.

### Types of placement

21. Similarly to pre-clinical/AHEMS, RCVS does not stipulate which placements

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would be “accepted” for clinical EMS. This again is down to the individual school to sign-off.

22. RCVS would not expect schools to be allowing any e-learning type placements for clinical EMS.
23. RCVS would encourage the majority of clinical EMS placements to take place off-campus and away from university farms or hospitals, or any locations where IMR is delivered, to allow students to gain further experience outside of the veterinary school environment. However, on-campus placements are allowed for within the policy.
24. RCVS would not usually expect schools to be allowing any type of placement where the student is not gaining direct clinical experience with animals. However, as laid out in the policy, longer term research placements can be allowed as part of the clinical EMS requirement. This is not a standard requirement, and allowing such a placement would be at the discretion of the school.

## Professional EMS

25. The basis for the 2 weeks allowance of “professional EMS”, i.e. non clinical placements, or those placements that do not directly involve animals, is that the majority of graduates will end up in clinical practice, and therefore RCVS would expect students to gain as much experience in clinical areas as possible before graduation. However, it is recognised that not all graduates will move into clinical practice, or may still be unsure whilst studying. Therefore, more than 2 weeks of professional EMS can be allowed for at the school’s discretion if a student has a genuine interest in a particular area of non-clinical work. Multiple professional EMS placements can also be allowed for in this instance.
26. Professional EMS placements that are not necessarily clinically based, but are clinically related can also be allowed for above the standard 2 week allowance. For example leadership, management or veterinary business focussed placements.
27. Professional EMS is not mandatory, however schools are free to implement their own policies which may include it. In doing so, it must be a standardised maximum of 2 weeks (with more to be allowed for in genuine cases of student interest as detailed in point 25) and it should be made clear to the students that this is a specific requirement of the school itself. ●

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