

European College of Veterinary Surgeons



EXAMINATION GUIDE

September 2023

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REQUIREMENTS FOR BOARD CERTIFICATION

The European College of Veterinary Surgeons (ECVS) has established the following requirements for active membership status. Veterinary surgeons should,

- a. Have a satisfactory ethical standing in the profession and
- b. Be a graduate of a veterinary college of a European country, unless relieved of this obligation by the Board of Regents and
- c. Be licensed to practice in a European country unless relieved of this obligation by the Board of Regents and
- d. Have devoted a minimum of four years after graduation from veterinary school to special training and gaining experience in veterinary surgery. The training programme should meet the requirements of the College as described in the training brochure and
- e. Have successfully passed the qualifying examination of the European or American College of Veterinary Surgeons and be certified by the Board of Regents of the European College.

To be eligible to sit the examination, candidates must have successfully completed the 156-week ECVS residency programme and have had their credentials application approved by the ECVS Board of Regents.

After being accepted to sit the examination, the candidate has a total of four attempts to pass all three parts of the examination within eight years. Candidates sitting the examination for the first time must take all three parts. Candidates who fail all or any parts of the exam may have three further attempts to pass those parts that have not been passed. All three parts of the examination must be successfully completed to become certified by the ECVS. Candidates who pass all parts of the examination will be issued a certificate indicating that they are a Diplomate of the ECVS.

Candidates who fail one or more parts of the examination the first, second or third time and plan to retake those parts must notify the ECVS office of their intention to sit the examination by completing the online application form and submitting the appropriate fee, via the ECVS website, by **October 25th** of the year preceding the next scheduled examination. Candidates should ensure that their contact details are correct on the ECVS website ('Your ECVS').

EXAMINATION SCHEDULE

On the day before the examination: Briefing session for candidates

Day 1:	SA case-based group 1 SA case-based group 2 (depending on no. of candidates) LA case based
Day 2:	SA practical LA practical
Day 3:	MCQ SA/LA
	Drinks reception for all candidates

Specific times of the exam may vary on a year to year basis, depending on the number of candidates and will be specified to each candidate in writing before the exams.

The examination is held in Zurich, Switzerland – except for exceptional circumstances when different arrangements may have to be made. The precise exam location will be communicated to the candidates with their personal schedule sent in December of the year preceding the examination.

TIME LINE

Year preceding the examination

September - October: An invitation to sit the examination will be sent to eligible candidates by e-mail.

By October 25th: Candidates should apply online to sit the exam. They should also download the Confidentiality Form (see Appendix One), sign the last page, and email to exam@ecvs.org as a scanned pdf.

By December 15th: Detailed examination schedule will be sent to candidates by e-mail with a personalised letter attached.

EXAMINATION DESCRIPTION

The examination tests all aspects of surgery in either small or large animals as well as competence in areas of specialisation. The examination is composed of three parts:

- case-based (Part I)
- practical (Part II)
- multiple choice (Part III)

Each of the three parts of the examination is prepared specifically for either large animal or small animal candidates. Each part of the examination will be administered on a separate day. The timetables and venues for the two groups may differ. The examination, or parts thereof, may be delivered to both large and small animal candidates in the same room at the same time.

The official language of the examination of the ECVS is English.

Questions for the ECVS examination are created and/or reviewed by the Examination Committee of the ECVS. Each question is validated by securing a reference source that corroborates the information in the question. The sources used include current veterinary textbooks, current veterinary medical and surgical journals, current medical texts and journals including, but not limited to, the reading list (see ECVS website).

1. General comments

You will receive a personal identification number in your personal examination schedule before the examination by mail. This number is only known by you and the ECVS Office. The Examination Committee members do not have access to these numbers until the entire examination has been marked and the pass mark has been set. **UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD THIS PERSONAL IDENTIFICATION NUMBER BE DIVULGED TO ANY OF THE EXAMINERS OR A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF REGENTS.** Please bring this number with you to the examination as you will need it to anonymously identify yourself in the computerised examination system. This allows anonymous evaluation of your exam with examiners blinded to the candidates' names. In case of pre-assigned seats (e.g. when a candidate requires a certain seat for health reasons or because of a specific hardware installation), the position will be indicated with the candidate's ID.

All parts of the exam may be fully delivered electronically, i.e. all images and data and the questions will appear on the candidate's individual screen and the candidate will be required to type their answers into the online computer system. Computers will be set-up with a QWERTY keyboard by default. Candidates are not allowed to bring individual keyboards into the examination. As far as technically possible, ECVS will provide different language keyboards. The available choice will be communicated to the candidates along with the invitation letter. Candidates who prefer a different keyboard other than QWERTY need to inform the Office of their choice in writing when signing up for the exam. Candidates cannot choose any keyboards other than those offered by ECVS, and there is no guarantee that keyboard orders received after the registration deadline can be accommodated.

Candidates will be provided with pencils, erasers and note paper for the examinations for making rough notes. Your notepaper will not be scored. All notepaper will be collected after each session and destroyed. **NO PAPER MAY BE TAKEN INTO OR OUT OF THE EXAMINATION ROOM BY THE CANDIDATES.**

Under no circumstances may mobile phones, iPads or smart watches be brought into the examination hall and all personal items must be kept in a bag that is left at the door. The only personal item that can be brought to the examination table is a language dictionary with no added notes. The use of a language dictionary is permitted in all three parts of the examination. Dictionaries should be labelled with the candidate's name. The Examiners may ask to check the dictionary before, during or after the examination. Candidates are not allowed to take the dictionaries out of the examination room during the breaks.

The official language of the ECVS examination is English. Complete answers in a language other than English will not be marked. However, some words may occasionally be written in one of the main European languages if a candidate cannot remember how to translate a specific word.

The use of abbreviations should be minimised and restricted to only commonly used medical abbreviations to make sure your answer is clearly understood. If you are concerned that the examiner may not understand the abbreviation, you should define it.

The Examination Committee will meet with all candidates for a general briefing session in the evening before the first examination day to clarify questions. During the exams, examiners will be in the room.

Negative marking is not used in any part of the examination.

2. Part I (Case-based Examination)

1. This part of the examination will assess a candidate's ability to manage a case prior to, during, and after surgery. Candidates will be required to interpret medical data and make decisions based on the information available to them. Candidates will be expected to answer questions covering all areas of surgical practice.
2. This part of the examination contains up to six cases with a total of about 60 subquestions. Areas that are covered by these cases are orthopaedics and soft tissue surgery. Further areas that may be covered include neurosurgery (small animals) and farm animal surgery (large animals).
3. This part of the examination is progressive. Answers to earlier questions may become evident as the case unfolds. This allows a candidate who is unable to answer questions early in the examination, to still acquire marks later in the examination. For this reason, the computerised system logs answers permanently as soon as a candidate moves on to the next question and does NOT allow modifying answers to previous questions.
4. Information about the cases is presented in the form of images, videos and other medical data that will be shown on the screens. **OBSERVE ALL INFORMATION PRESENTED ON THE SCREEN PRIOR TO ANSWERING QUESTIONS.**
5. The time allowance for the case-based exam is five hours delivered in two sessions with a short break in-between. A timer is placed on the screen to facilitate time keeping for the candidates.
6. Candidates are responsible for their own time keeping and may proceed through the questions at their own speed.
7. In each session, candidates choose and answer cases in their own chosen order. The first question of each case will be displayed, allowing candidates to set their own order.
8. If technical difficulties arise that cause candidates not to be able to proceed with the exam, the examination time will be adjusted appropriately, if the delay exceeds 5 minutes in total, so that candidates will still receive the full amount of time.
9. It is expected that candidates give short written answers in English. Essay-style answers are not expected.
10. If a question asks for a specific number of responses, the Examiners will only mark the number of responses requested. The responses will be marked in the order that they were written down by the candidate. Additional responses beyond the number requested will not be graded.

For example;

Question: *"List two main causes of this condition"*

Answer: "Diabetes, Cushing's syndrome, Hypothyroidism", only the first two answers will be marked, even if the third was correct.

11. Candidates are allowed to take a drink and a snack when entering the room. In case a toilet visit is needed or more drinks / snacks are required, candidates must seek the assistance of
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one of the invigilators. Session running time will not be paused for individual breaks. Candidates will not be permitted to leave the room before completing the session other than to visit the toilet or in case of emergency.

12. Once all questions have been answered, the candidate may leave the room by logging out of the computer programme and signing out on an attendance list indicating the time they leave.
13. New questions are prepared each year by members of the Examination Committee. Before delivering the exam, the Examination Committee conducts a review process involving members of the ECVS Exam Committee and Board of Regents before the exam to test all questions and visual materials for clarity and fairness.
14. This part of the exam is scored blindly by multiple Examination Committee members according to preset marking guidelines.
15. Before the beginning of Part I of the examination, candidates will be given the opportunity to practice with the computerised testing system. Sample questions of the exam will be made available online on the ECVS website (see below).

3. Part II (Practical Examination)

1. The practical section of the examination is designed to test recognition and interpretative skills.
2. This part of the examination is five hours in duration, delivered in two sessions with a short break in-between and comprises 20 scenarios with 3 questions each, resulting in a total of 60 questions. Occasionally, a scenario may have 2 or 4 questions, but the total number of questions remains 60.
3. Each question will relate to images or other visual material on the computer screen. Images may be of diagnostic images/investigations, surgical procedures/ equipment/ implants, anatomic specimens, laboratory test results, cytology/histopathology slides etc. Video clips may be used.
4. Candidates are allowed free navigation over the scenarios in a given session and answers may be altered throughout the exam until final submission.
5. Short written answers in English are expected. Essay-style answers are not required.
6. When a question requires the candidate to provide a specific number of responses, the Examiners will only mark the number of responses requested. The responses will be marked in the order that they were written down by the candidate. Additional answers beyond the number requested will not be marked.
7. There will be no break, but candidates are allowed to take a drink and a snack when entering the room. In case a toilet visit is needed or more drinks / snacks are required candidates must seek the assistance of one of the invigilators. Candidates will not be permitted to leave the room before completing their examination other than to visit the lavatory or in case of emergency.
8. Once all questions have been answered, the candidate may leave before the end of the session by logging out of the computer programme and signing out on an attendance list indicating the time they leave.
9. New questions are prepared each year by members of the Examination Committee. Before delivering the exam, the Examination Committee conducts a review process involving members of the ECVS Exam Committee and Board of Regents before the exam to test all questions and visual materials for clarity and fairness.
10. This part of the examination is scored blindly by multiple Examination Committee Members, according to pre-set scoring guidelines.

4. Part III (Multiple Choice Questions)

1. This part will consist of 100 multiple-choice questions delivered in a session of 5 hours' duration. There will be 4 possible answers for each of the questions and the candidate will be expected to choose one.
2. Of the 100 questions, about 10%-20% may be of a general nature (not species specific) and the remaining approximately 80%-90% of the questions are specific small animal surgery questions (small animal exam) or are divided into equine and food animal questions (large animal exam). In the large animal exam, farm animal questions will constitute up to approximately 20% of the MCQ, at maximum.
3. New written questions are developed each year by the Examination Committee members and members of the MCQ Subcommittee, i.e. a group of ECVS Diplomates recruited by the Examination Committee members. These questions are reviewed for relevance, clarity and importance for competent practice.
4. This part of the examination is computer-scored, according to pre-set scoring guidelines.
5. Candidates are allowed to take a drink and a snack when entering the room. In case a toilet visit is needed or more drinks / snacks are required, candidates must seek the assistance of one of the invigilators. Session running time will not be paused for individual breaks. Candidates will not be permitted to leave the room before completing the session other than to visit the toilet or in case of emergency.
6. Once all questions have been answered, the candidate may leave the examination room before the end of the session by logging out of the computer programme and signing out on an attendance list indicating the time of termination.
7. Questions will cover all the systems listed below:

01	Alimentary
02	Cardiovascular
03	Respiratory
04	Urogenital
05	Skin
06	Musculoskeletal
07	Neurological
08	Endocrine
09	Eye/Ear
10	General

Within each of these systems, questions will cover the following areas of basic science and surgical knowledge: anatomy, physiology, pathophysiology, biomechanics, surgical principles, surgical approaches, surgical techniques, pharmacology including fluid therapy, surgical equipment and implants, diagnosis, diagnostic techniques, imaging, non-surgical conditions and their management, surgical complications and prognosis.

EXAMINATION RULES

The integrity of the certification examination of the European College of Veterinary Surgeons will be maintained to ensure fairness to all candidates during testing. Any questions before the examination should be directed to Wiebke Schmidt-Reyer, ECVS Operations Manager, at +41-(0)44-635 8492 or the Chair of the respective Examination Committee. During the examination, the Chair of the Examination Committee must not be consulted but enquiries should be addressed to the Operations Manager.

1. A candidate must apply online via www.ecvs.org ('Your ECVS'). In addition, they should download the confidentiality form, sign and date it confirming they have read and understood it and they agree to abide by the described protocols and processes. When completed, the confidentiality form should be emailed to exam@ecvs.org as a scanned pdf (no need to send a hard copy). The confidentiality form can be viewed in Appendix One of this document.

2. If a candidate requires special examination conditions e.g. due to corporal and/or psychological disability, learning difficulties, or medical condition, they must inform the ECVS Office in writing before the application deadline. In such cases, supporting documentation will need to be provided.

3. Examination Fee: Details of examinations fees are listed on the website. Fees may be paid on-line from 'Your ECVS'. Payment must be sent with the application documents and is refundable to a rate of 75% up to 8 weeks and 50% up to 4 weeks prior to the exam. If the examination is not taken, the attempt will not be counted but one of the eight years in which to pass the exam will have been forfeited.

4. Following their on-line application to sit the exam, candidates must return the following material to the ECVS office on or before October 25th in the year preceding the examination (no exceptions will be granted):

- a completed, signed and dated Confidentiality Form (scan, PDF format, sent via email)
- a request for any Special Conditions for Examinees with e.g. disability, learning difficulty or medical condition
- payment of the examination fee. This should be done on-line from 'Your ECVS'.

5. Withdrawal from the exam: In the event of unexpected illness resulting in inability to take the exam, the candidate should send a medical certificate to the ECVS Office. Upon receipt of a satisfactory medical certificate, the fee will be refunded, and the attempt may be deferred at the discretion of the Board of Regents, i.e., an additional year may, at the discretion of the Board of Regents, be allowed to pass the exam.

Withdrawal from the examination prior to its start will result in the attempt not being counted, but one of the eight years in which to pass the exam will have been forfeited. If a candidate believes there are grounds for leniency based upon extenuating circumstances and that an additional (9th) year should be added to their allowance, they are write to the Executive Secretary of the Board of Regents who may request a vote from the Board. The outcome of such a vote is not predictable.

By December 15th, candidates will receive a registration confirmation letter from the ECVS office. If a candidate has submitted the above examination registration pack and does not receive a confirmation letter from the ECVS office by December 15th the candidate should contact the ECVS office immediately. Note: Candidates are responsible for notifying the ECVS office of any address changes prior to and following the examination.

ECVS EXAMINATION READING LIST

The current reading lists are published on the [ECVS website](#).

The lists are intended to help candidates plan their study for the ECVS Certifying Examination. The majority of questions will come from these texts but these lists are not exhaustive, and other textbooks and current references may be pertinent. Knowledge of basic and applied anatomy is assumed. Candidates may have their own preferred texts for certain areas.

Additionally, prospective candidates are reminded that they will be expected to be able to demonstrate adequate knowledge of surgically related disciplines (e.g. radiology, anaesthesia, clinical pathology, cardiology etc.) as well as associated basic sciences. Candidates should allocate time to specifically study these areas. Candidates are encouraged to develop their own system-based timetable of reading. It is useful to work whenever possible with colleagues, who can provide regular opportunities for small group presentations and peer review.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

A brief mock exam that includes sample questions of all parts of the exam are available on the ECVS web site www.ecvs.org.

EVALUATION OF THE EXAMINATION AND DETERMINATION OF PASSING SCORE

1. The Examination Committee will evaluate the results of the examination.
2. The Examination Committee sets the pass mark using an accepted validity scoring system.

Case-based (Part I) and Practical (Part II) Examinations: The Borderline Group Method is used to set the pass score for these parts of the examination. The Borderline Group Method is a two-step process. In the first step, candidates' test results are grouped into three categories by predetermined knowledge levels (based on the concept of a "minimally qualified candidate"): a "pass" group, a "fail" group, and a "borderline" group. A consensus of at least 3 examiners – each evaluating the candidate's script independently – is required for allocation into one of these groups. In the second step of the process, the candidates in the borderline group are point scored. The median score is calculated then set as the final pass mark. All steps in the Borderline Group Method are performed so that the decision makers are blinded to the candidates' names.

Multiple choice Examination (Part III): The Hofstee method is used to set the passing score for the MCQ part of the examination. The minimum and maximum failure rates for the examination are determined as well as what the minimum and maximum passing scores (in percent of the total score) should be. These rates and percent scores are projected onto the actual score distribution to derive a passing score.

REPORTING OF RESULTS AND FEEDBACK TO CANDIDATES

Results of the ECVS examination will be mailed within four weeks to all candidates. Results will indicate whether the candidate passed or failed each of the three components of the exam. Within six weeks, candidates who failed will receive a document from the Chair of the Examination Committee, with more specific and individual feedback regarding their exam performance.

Candidates who have failed may ask for a mentor/advisor to assist their preparation for their next attempt. Requests should be directed to exam@ecvs.org.

The manuscripts of unsuccessful candidates will be stored at the ECVS Office for six years. No copies of either question or answers will be sent to the candidate.

APPEAL PROCEDURE

The Appeal Procedure is defined in the [SOP "Appeal Procedure"](#).

EXAMINATION SECURITY

Candidates are obliged to carry an official personal identification document with photograph (ID) on them which will be checked by the invigilators before the start of each exam part. If a candidate fails to carry an ID for any reason and it is not possible to check for the identity by reasonable means, he or she will be refused to sit the exam.

1. Unethical Behaviour

- a. If evidence by observation or statistical analysis or any other available means of validation suggests that one or more candidates' results may be invalid because of unethical behaviour by one or more candidates prior to, during, or after the examination, ECVS may change the time and place of a subsequent examination or may withhold the results pending for further investigation. The affected candidates will be notified.
- b. Examples of unethical behaviour would include, but not be limited to: (i) copying of answers from another candidate; (ii) permitting one's answers to be copied; (iii) unauthorised possession, reproduction, or disclosure of materials, including examination questions or answers, before, during, or after the examination; and (iv) any other evidence indicating that the security of the examination may have been breached.
- c. In the event that candidates are suspected to be engaging in unethical behaviour during an examination, the examiner(s) will make carefully written notes, including the party(ies) involved, time, examination section, etc., but will not disrupt the examination by confronting the candidate(s) concerned, unless safety or exam integrity for other candidates does require so. Notification of suspected unethical behaviour will be made to the candidate(s) by the chair of the respective Exam Committee at the earliest possible time following completion of the examination and any subsequent investigations needed. The candidate(s) will be advised of the procedure for imposing sanctions and informed that results may be withheld as invalid.
- d. At the completion of all investigations, affected candidates will be notified of the validity of the results in question. If it is determined that the results are invalid, they will not be released.
- e. ECVS will make every effort to withhold the results of only those candidates directly implicated in or affected by the unethical behaviour. If the evidence of unethical behaviour casts doubt on the validity of all results, and/or this evidence does not enable the ECVS to identify the particular candidates implicated or affected, the Board of Regents reserves the right to withhold the results of any or all candidate(s) and, if necessary, to require such candidate(s) to take an additional examination at a later date under conditions that will ensure the validity of all results.
- f. Candidates or other persons who are directly implicated in unethical behaviour affecting the validity of the examination results are subject to additional sanctions, including (but not limited to) being barred permanently from all future examinations and exclusion from membership of the ECVS.

2. Procedure of investigation and determination of incidents of suspected Unethical Behaviour

- a. ECVS shall provide written notice to any candidate or other person whom it has grounds to suspect has engaged in unethical behaviour of:
 - (i) The nature of the suspected unethical behaviour;
 - (ii) The opportunity to respond to the notification of suspected unethical behaviour, in writing, to the Appeals Committee of the ECVS;
 - (iii) The range of possible sanction or sanctions which the ECVS may impose if it determines that the allegations of unethical behaviour are upheld.
- b. Within twenty days after receiving aforementioned notice, the candidate or other person subject to the investigation shall advise the Executive Secretary of the ECVS, in writing, whether he or she wishes to admit or deny the allegations of suspected unethical behaviour and, if denied (whether in part or in whole), whether he or she wishes to make representations in writing. If the subject candidate or other person fails to respond, the Board of Regents of the ECVS may determine the alleged unethical behaviour and the imposition of any available sanction without further notice.
- c. Within twenty (20) days after receipt of a request for an opportunity to defend the allegation(s) of unethical behaviour from the subject candidate or other person, the Executive Secretary of the ECVS shall provide him/her with a written summary of the incriminating evidence giving grounds for suspicion, including copies of any relevant documentary evidence. The subject candidate shall send his or her written representations to the ECVS office within thirty days after the date of the Executive Secretary's summary of evidence. The Appeals Committee of the ECVS shall issue its written decision as soon as possible thereafter.
- d. The written determination of the Appeals Committee, and its recommendations as to appropriate sanction, shall be sent to the subject candidate or other person and to the Executive Secretary of the ECVS at the same time. The Executive Secretary shall distribute the Appeals Committee's written decision to the entire Board of Regents. Not before fourteen days and not later than thirty days of the date of the Appeals Committee's written decision, the Board of Regents will decide (by majority vote if necessary) what (if any) sanctions should be imposed as a result of the accepted findings.
- e. If the subject candidate or other person wishes to appeal to the Board of Regents against the Appeals Committee's determinations of the allegations of unethical behaviour, and/or wishes to make representations as to appropriate sanction, he/she shall do so in writing to the Executive Secretary not later than fourteen days of the date of the Appeal Committee's written decision.

Appendix One

Confidentiality Form

Candidates should download this Confidentiality Form, sign and date it and email it as a scanned pdf to exam@ecvs.org by October 25th of the year preceding the exam.

Application to sit the examination

- 1.1 Candidates should read and understand the contents of the Examination Guide.
- 1.2 When applying to sit the examination, candidates should sign and date the following statement:

I (name _____)

apply to sit the Certifying Examination of (year _____).

In doing so, I confirm that I have read and understood the Examination Guide and agree to abide by the described protocols and processes. I understand the examination is confidential and I may not share or distribute material derived from the examination.

Signed.....

Date.....