



European College of Veterinary Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation

ECVSMR Examination

Standard Operating Procedure



1. Requirements for Board Certification

Standards for admission to membership by examination

The College will only certify veterinarians who

- a) have demonstrated fitness and ability to practise the speciality by meeting the established training and experience requirements and by attaining acceptable scores on comprehensive examinations administered by the College.
- b) have demonstrated satisfactory moral and ethical standing in the profession.
- c) practise scientific, evidence-based veterinary medicine, which complies with animal welfare legislation.
- d) have gained their veterinary degree at least 48 months previously.

2. Policy on examination procedure

The examination is carried out in accordance with the EBVS policy on examination procedures.

2.1. Validation of credentials and application to sit the examination

The resident must submit their credentials to the Credentials Committee within 18 months of completion of the residency (see Bylaws). The minimum number of training programme months must have been completed before the candidate sits the examination.

All candidates intending to submit their credentials for approval and/or to sit the qualifying examinations must send the 'Credential Evaluation' and 'Application to sit the exam' forms and all required documentation no later than three months before the exam they wish to sit.

Candidates who apply to sit the examination are automatically declaring themselves "fit to sit". Candidates may withdraw based on extenuating circumstances by informing the College's Secretary.

2.2. Description of the examination

2.2.1. General points

The examination comprises three parts, and candidates are required to pass all parts of the examination to become board-certified by the ECVSMR. Candidates who pass all parts of the examination will be issued a certificate indicating that they are a Diplomate of the ECVSMR. 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. Failure to appear at an examination or aborting an examination without extenuating circumstances counts as examination attempt.

Candidates sitting the examination for the first time must take all three parts. Candidates sitting the examination for the second, third or fourth time must take all parts not successfully completed previously. For the Initial Applicant Pathway, 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.

The language of correspondence and examination is English. The use of language dictionaries during the examination is allowed.



2.2.2. Examination software

For Part 1 and Part 2 of the examination and the mock examination, candidates use their own laptop using the Exemplify® examination software. Candidates are sent an invitation from Examssoft® to create an account. When creating the account candidates are asked to ensure they leave the time zone set to Poland (GMT+1), whatever their time zone actually is. Candidates have to download the dedicated software Exemplify®. Candidates have to add a new account with 'EBVS' as institution and log in with their email address and personal password. Candidates can download available examination(s). The examination can be started when candidates type in the exam password, provided just before the start of the examination. On completion of the examination, candidates must upload the completed examination.

To provide candidates with the opportunity to gain experience in using the examination software, mock examinations are organised. Candidates are requested to perform three mock examinations at a set time period in the month preceding the examination. The first mock examination is to test the software, and the second and third are to provide an insight how the software works specifically for Part 1 and Part 2 of the examination. The mock examinations are short (10 minutes for Part 1 and 20 minutes for Part 2). Following the mock examinations, a web conference is organised, where candidates can discuss any technical questions regarding the examination software.

Part 3 of the examination is written in Examssoft. On completion, the file is saved in the software.

2.2.3. Examination Part 1, core knowledge

This part comprises 100 multiple-choice questions (MCQ's) to allow the candidate to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts and principles behind sports medicine and rehabilitation and their knowledge of the recent scientific findings in the field. Each question has three distractors and one correct answer. Each positive answer yields one point. The duration of this examination is four hours.

2.2.4. Examination Part 2, case-based questions

The candidate is presented 20 clinical case scenarios, including video and/or picture material. The candidate is expected to answer questions related to the aetiopathogenesis, diagnostic process, treatment options and prognosis of the cases. This part is specific to the small animal or equine subspecialty according to the chosen track and gives the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate how they can apply their knowledge to approach cases. For each case, several questions are asked. The correct answers add up to 10 points for each case.

In the software, only forward movement (advancing) is possible, which means that the candidate can move from one question to the next, but not backwards. The same is valid for the answers. In this way, information is provided to candidates in a sequential manner while also avoiding penalising candidates with 'subsequent error'. The duration of Part 2 is four hours, with either a break after two hours, or half of Part 2 is taken on Day 1 of the examination, and the second half on Day 2.

2.2.5. Examination Part 3, review of a scientific manuscript



Candidates are presented with a scientific manuscript and are expected to write a critical review evaluating the scientific merit and discuss if and how the findings of this study may influence clinical practice. This part will focus on the candidate's ability to critically evaluate scientific studies and assess its merit in the light of clinical practice and existing scientific literature. The duration of this part of the examination is three hours.

2.3. Evaluation of the examination and determination of passing score

The Examination Committee evaluates the results of the examination and sets the pass mark, using an accepted validity scoring system. Negative marking is not used in any part of the examination.

2.3.1. Part 1 and Part 2

The modified Angoff Method is used to set the pass score for the MCQ and case-based examinations. This method is based on the assembly of a group of ECVSMR diplomates (Examination Committee members), who are asked to evaluate each item and estimate the proportion of minimally competent examinees that would correctly answer the item. When rating questions, correct answers are not shown to the assessors. The ratings are averaged across raters for each item and then summed to obtain a panel-recommended raw cut score. Where raters differ by more than 30%, questions are reviewed by the group in an open forum. This cut score then represents the score which the panel estimates a minimally competent candidate would get. A minimally competent candidate possesses just enough knowledge and skill to be a Diplomat of the ECVSMR. In Part 1, one point is given for each correctly answered MCQ. In Part 2, each question will indicate how many marks will be allocated to the correct answers. For each case, a maximum of 10 points can be gained if all answers are correct.

2.3.2. Part 3

Part 3 comprises the critical evaluation of a scientific manuscript. The candidate should focus on the following five areas: (1) Evaluation of selection and description of literature and its relevance to the presented study; (2) Evaluation of description of methods and selection of material; (3) Evaluation of alignment of hypothesis and aims of the study with study design, and data analysis; (4) Evaluation of soundness of conclusion; (5) Evaluation of layout, presentation of data, appropriate use of graphs, tables and figures. The candidates' evaluations are rated by two senior members of the College with decades of experience in research, scientific writing, and postgraduate education. A marking rubric is used to determine the characteristics that define the minimally competent new diplomate, and each section is scored out of 10. The minimally competent new diplomate is defined by a 60% passing score in each section. However, candidates can cross compensate between sections with a total of 30 marks being required for the candidate to have passed each section.

2.4. Communication of the results of the examination

The Chair of the Examination Committee forwards the anonymised results of the examination to the Executive Committee for ratification. Following ratification, the

Secretary of the College informs the candidates of the outcome electronically. Results are communicated to the candidates within 20 working days following completion of the examination.

In case a candidate fails to demonstrate that they reached the required level of expertise and does not reach the pass rate, a brief written examiners' report (describing which components of the exams are below or above the pass rate) will also be provided to the candidate to aid their preparation for future examination attempts.



3. Preparation of examination content

3.1. Examination questions

Multiple choice questions and case-based questions are prepared by the members of the Examination committee. Other members of the College may also be asked to provide questions. Each year a weekend is organised, where equine and small animal working groups, comprising at least 3-4 examination committee members in each group, perform a thorough review of each question and write new questions when necessary. The review includes but is not limited to scientific content, being supported by literature included in the reading list, language, and ease of comprehension.

The scientific paper used in Part 3 is chosen by two Examination committee members with decades of experience in postgraduate education, who mark this part of the examination. A different publication is used each year and is taken from unpublished works.

3.2. Examination content

An initial selection of questions for the examination is made during the review weekend. The aim is that each year at least 50% of all questions used in the examination are new.

3.3. Quality control

Two equine and two small animal members of the Examination committee review the draft examination approximately one to two months before the examination. These members are not part of the question writing and review working groups. Any questions flagged during the quality control review are re-assessed and corrected or removed by the question writing group.

4. Examination venue and schedule

When possible, the examination takes place in person, preferably at a centre where a sufficient number of ECVSMR diplomates is available to act as invigilators. The accessibility to the candidates by air or train is also an important factor in venue selection. The examination usually takes place in February. The exact dates and location of the examination is announced on the College's website a minimum of 10 months prior to the next examination. A detailed schedule of the examination is sent to the candidates approximately one month before the examination.

In case of pandemic or epidemic travel restrictions, the examination may need to be performed as online examination under national invigilation. This change in format is announced at least two months prior to the examination date.



An example timetable of the examination

Day 1: 08:00 - 12:00: written exam Part 1
13.00 - 15.00: written exam Part 2a
Day 2: 08:00 - 10:00: written exam Part 2b
11:00 - 14.00: written exam Part 3

5. Communication with candidates

General information (e.g., examination guide, date and venue of the examination) is published on the College's website. Candidates who applied for the examination are sent further specific information by email. The Examination committee organises a seminar for residents and other candidates at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the College where example examination questions are presented, and candidates can ask questions and discuss any issues they might have regarding the examination.

6. Further examination rules

6.1. Technical aspects

Each of the three parts of the examination is prepared specifically for either equine or small animal candidates although general questions may appear in both groups of candidates.

Candidates are provided with pens and note paper for the examinations. Candidates are not allowed to bring mobile phones, tablets, smart watches or any other electronic devices into the examination room. The candidates' personal items must be kept in a bag that is left at the entrance of the examination room. The only personal items that can be brought to the examination table are a language dictionary, drinks and snacks needed for the duration of the examination. The use of a language dictionary is permitted during 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. It is not allowed to take the dictionaries out of the examination room during the breaks.

All examination papers will be collected after each session. No paper may be taken into or out of the examination room by candidates. The answer booklets/sheets are identified only with the candidates' personal identification numbers.

6.2. Medical issues

If the candidate requires special seating for medical reasons, they will need to inform the ECVSMR office in writing prior to the registration deadline. In this situation, the candidate will need to provide pertinent supportive medical documentation. Candidates with illness or disabilities that are supported by properly evidenced medical evidence will be considered on a case-by-case basis. There will be no change in the passing score. Candidates with illness will either be allowed to delay their attempt to another year, without penalty, or will be allowed additional time to attempt the examination. The amount of additional time will be considered by the examination committee with input from external colleagues where required. If a candidate feels unwell during the examination process, they should immediately notify the Chairperson of the Examination Committee.

6.3. Appeal Procedure

Any appeal against a candidate's examination outcome follows the rules outlined in the College's bylaws.

6.4. Procedure to re-sit the qualifying examination

Candidates may apply to re-take all parts of the examination three times and all parts of the examination must be passed within eight years of completion of the residency programme. A candidate who takes the examination and passes one of the three parts, retains credit for the parts passed for the next four years. Candidates must apply for a re-sit using the application form a minimum of three months before the exam date, together with the fee for the submission and with the evidence (e.g., acceptance email) of having passed the credentials. Failure to appear at an examination without extenuating circumstances or aborting an examination count as attempt to sit the examination.



6.5. Examination security

6.5.1. Non-disclosure

All members of the Examination Committee sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement.

6.5.2. 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, ECVSMR may change the time and place of a subsequent examination or may withhold the results pending further investigation. The affected candidates will be so notified.
- b) Examples of unethical behaviour include but are not 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 take carefully written notes, including the party(ies) involved, time, examination section, etc., but will not disrupt the examination by confronting the candidate(s) concerned. Notification of suspected unethical behaviour will be made to the candidate(s) 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) ECVSMR 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 ECVSMR to identify the particular candidates implicated or affected, the Board 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 ECVSMR.



6.5.3. Procedure of investigation and determination of incidents of suspected unethical behaviour

The board will appoint an ad-hoc committee made up of two to three members who have neither connection to the candidate nor the examination process who will consider the evidence of misconduct based upon the principles of civil burden of proof, i.e. balance of probabilities. The candidate may make specific objections to the president about the membership of the committee, where a documented conflict of interest can be shown.

- a) ECVSMR 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 identity of the ad-hoc panel that will review the matter
 - (ii) The opportunity to respond to the notification of suspected unethical behaviour, in writing, to the ad-hoc committee
 - (iii) The range of possible sanction or sanctions, which the ECVSMR may impose if it determines that the allegations of unethical behaviour are upheld.
- b) Within 20 days after receiving aforementioned notice, the candidate or any other person, who is subject to the investigation shall advise the Secretary of the ECVSMR, 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 they wish to make representations in writing. The ad-hoc committee may allow verbal representations using an online meeting. If the subject candidate or other person fails to respond, the Board of ECVSMR may determine the alleged unethical behaviour and the imposition of any available sanction without further notice.
- c) Within 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 Secretary of the ECVSMR 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 ECVSMR office within 30 days after the date of the Secretary's summary of evidence. The ad-hoc committee shall issue its written recommendations as soon as possible thereafter.
- d) The written determination of the ad-hoc Committee, and its recommendations as to appropriate sanction, shall be sent to the subject candidate or other person and to the Secretary of the ECVSMR at the same time. The Secretary shall distribute the ad-hoc Committee's written recommendations to the entire Board. Not before 14 days and not later than 30 days of the date of the ad-hoc Committee's written decision, the Board 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 the Boards' decision, then this must follow the EBVS' standard procedures for appeals.

- f) Candidates are not able to claim any financial compensation based on the outcomes of the process for unethical behaviour.
- g) The College should consider what data should be shared with the national regulator based on data retention and confidentiality.
- h) Confidentiality: No personal details relating to unethical behaviour will be shared by email to emails domains outside the control of ECVSMR without documents appropriately encrypted/redacted. The ad-hoc Committee will be required to complete a non-disclosure agreement and agree not to share any personal details relating to the investigation. Data will be retained in line with the ECVSMR examination policies on data retention.



Data retention and confidentiality

The College has an obligation to store personal data relating to examination data (pass or fail) in perpetuity. The outcomes of individual attempts will be retained until such time as a candidate either passes or exceeds the number of attempts or eight-year time limit. At that point the outcomes and individual scores will be archived in an anonymised form in perpetuity to allow the college to monitor completion rates overall, by species, and training centre.

Documents related to extenuating personal circumstances or misconduct represent data requiring special protection under euGDPR (or FADP). Such documents will be shared in the ECVSMR secure document store and will be accessed by the minimum number of members of the relevant committee in order to form conclusions. Where possible, these will not be shared as email attachments without encryption / redaction of personal data.

- a) The accompanying evidence for EC claims will be permanently erased upon the end of the examination and appeals period. A summary of the adjustments for each candidate will be retained for a maximum of two years after a candidate becomes a diplomate or upon failure of a final attempt. Outcomes may be retained by the college in anonymised forms for monitoring purposes.
- b) Data relating to claims of misconduct that are not upheld will not be retained beyond the appeal period. The college will confirm by email when records are erased.
- c) Data relating to claims of misconduct that are upheld for as long as considered necessary by the board and will be decided on a case-by-case basis. Where a candidate is permanently excluded from the college, the college may decide it is appropriate to share this information with the national competent authority where the individual is authorised to practice. The college will conduct a legitimate interest assessment before sharing this information, especially where this involves sharing the data across national or European boundaries, while also considering the regulatory requirements of data sharing.