

Essential Standards for Companion Animal Veterinary Practices

Terms of Reference for Standards Steering Committee

Background & Context

Veterinary practice accreditation schemes are becoming more and more prevalent in western countries. For example, in the UK over two thirds of veterinary practices are participating in the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme¹. In the US, approximately 15% of practices are accredited by AAHA². Australia³ and Thailand⁴ also have their own schemes. All schemes listed are voluntary for practices to participate in⁵. There are many things that a veterinary practice should have in place if it is to operate in a safe and legal way for its patients, veterinary team, clients, and the wider public. Accreditation schemes are often underpinned by a framework of standards. It is those standards that are used to decide whether a veterinary practice receives accreditation. Standards are often grouped into categories. For example, physical premises, anaesthesia, surgery, pharmacy, human resources, and client care.

There are many reasons why a veterinary practice may choose to adopt an accreditation scheme or to follow the standards that underpin them. Adopting veterinary practice standards can assist with improved safety for all, better clinical outcomes for patients, learning & development opportunities for the veterinary team, and act as a marketing tool for differentiating one veterinary practice from another. Veterinary practice standards may prove particularly useful in areas where companion animal veterinary practice is still developing and assist those countries with facilitating government and councils to formalise the standards within their country, if needed. Regardless of the reason veterinary practices choose to adopt standards, ultimately, they assist the veterinary team with embracing a culture of quality improvement.

The subject of veterinary practice standards, including what the minimum level of standard for a companion animal veterinary practice should be, first emerged as an area of interest for WSAVA member associations during a capacity and needs assessment conducted in 2019, as part of the development of the WSAVA's 2020/2022 strategy. In 2022, WSAVA held a Regional Member Forum in Asia. The topic of minimum veterinary practice standards was a core part of the agenda. The outcome of that forum clearly highlighted there is still a need in the Asia region for such a tool. A recommendation was made for the matter to be discussed by the whole WSAVA membership, at their General Assembly 2023 (Lisbon). That meeting concluded with a large consensus that WSAVA should further develop the idea of essential standards for companion animal veterinary practices.

¹ <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/practice-standards-scheme/>

² <https://www.aaha.org/practice-resources/aaha-standards/>

³ <https://www.ava.com.au/about-us/programs-awards/accredited-veterinary-hospital-scheme/>

⁴ <https://www.vpatthailand.org/about-tahsa>

⁵ The schemes listed are those that WSAVA are aware of through our initial research.

Purpose of the Standards Steering Committee (SSC)

The purpose of the SSC is to oversee the development and launch of WSAVA's Essential Standards for Companion Animal Veterinary Practices (ESCAVP).

Objectives of the SSC

1. Consider key strategic partner organizations that may assist with the development and launch of the ESCAVP.
2. Develop a pragmatic project plan that outlines the key phases of ESCAVP's development: Initiation, Planning & Research, Write-up, Review & Approval, Launch, Implementation, etcetera.
3. Research and consider the fields that are relevant to modern day companion animal veterinary practices and agree which should be featured in ESCAVP6.
4. Research and agree on a standardized format for how the ESCAVP should be written and presented.
5. Research and write the various standard documents / frameworks for each of the agreed fields that should feature in the ESCAVP.
6. Ensure that the ESCAVP is developed in a way that enables companion animal veterinary practices to benchmark their current ways of working, identify areas for improvement, and know where they may go for further support7.

Committee Membership

1. Membership of the committee will be discipline-based to cover the breadth of activities falling within companion animal veterinary practice (both clinical and non-clinical) – examples of disciplines are provided in the appendix. Due to the focus of this committee being primarily first opinion veterinary practice, preference will be given to those with strong and demonstrable experience within that environment, including veterinary practitioners and practice management. Preference will be given to those who are able to represent a variety of fields in the appendix and particularly those with experience in veterinary practice accreditation. Consideration will be given to ensure that the committee is representative of the various world regions (such as but not limited to North America, South America, Africa, Europe, Asia, and Oceania).

⁶ In line with WSAVA's strategic objective to champion the non-clinical aspects of companion animal veterinary practice, the ESCAVP must also include such topics within its scope. For example, but not limited to, the leadership and development of the veterinary team, client care, etcetera.

⁷ Areas of further support may include but is not limited to, existing WSAVA clinical guidelines, WSAVA certificate courses, WSAVA member association resources.

2. Inaugural committee members will have staggered terms. For example, some will serve an initial term of one year, two years or three years, with the ability to renew for a complete 3-year term.
3. To assist with budget control and effective meeting management, the committee shall exist of ideally no more than eight volunteer members. If there is a need to exceed this number, then approval must be sought from the Executive Board.
4. At least one member of the committee will be from the WSAVA Secretariat, but they shall not count towards the maximum number of committee members stated in point 3.
5. Member selection must comply with the Nominations and Selection Process for Membership of WSAVA Committees, Working Groups and Specialist Committees.
6. Member tenure of committees shall be 3 years with the ability to renew once for another 3-year term (maximum of 6 years). Renewal of membership tenure is to be automatic after authorisation by the rest of the committee (via a secret ballot), or unless the member elects to step down.
7. Members shall sit on no more than two committees at any one time, however if there is a need for specialised knowledge, members may sit on a committee in a temporary advisory capacity. This membership stipulation may also be waived in special circumstances, after review by the Membership and Nomination committee and the Executive Board.
8. Chairpersons of committees shall be chosen from within the committee and will be ratified by the Executive Board. If no Chairperson is available from within the committee, then selection will be via open nominations.
9. Chairpersons of committees shall ideally have served on the committee for at least 2 years. This stipulation can be waived in special circumstances after examination by the Membership and Nominations Committee and Executive Board. Chairpersons shall hold the position for a maximum of 3 years, to be voted in each year by the rest of the committee.
10. If a committee member is not performing their duties to the satisfaction of the Chairperson and the rest of the committee, the procedure to address this issue is:
 - a) An informal discussion is to be held with the committee member by the Chairperson, as to the reasons for the underperformance. In the case of underperformance by the Chairperson of a committee, this discussion will be held with an Executive Board member or the Executive Director.
 - b) If the matter cannot be resolved via the informal discussion, then a Letter of Warning will be sent from the Membership & Nomination Committee to the committee member, advising that the Committee is unhappy with the level of engagement and will ask for the committee member to discuss this issue. The member will be advised they have 14 days to respond to the Letter of Warning.
 - c) If there is no response to the Letter of Warning, then a second reminder letter is to be sent to the committee member with another 14-day deadline for a response.

- d) If there is still no response from the committee member, the Membership & Nomination Committee will advise the member of their immediate removal from the committee.

Obligations of the Committee

1. At least one member of the committee must be present at committee events held at Congress.
2. If a face-to-face meeting is needed by a committee, then the WSAVA World Congress is the preferred venue for that meeting.
3. Face-to-face meetings with sponsors are to be stipulated as per sponsorship agreements.

Other Rights and Obligations of the Committee

1. The committee will provide input to the WSAVA Annual Report.
2. The committee will propose an annual budget for any activity they anticipate occurring expense in the following year.
3. The committee will propose a plan of work for the short to medium term future (ideally covering a period of three years).

Appendix

The SSC may consist of committee members which represent a variety of disciplines relevant to companion animal veterinary practice in the twenty-first century. This may include but is not limited to:

- Diagnostics
- Animal Welfare, Ethics, and Legal Issues
- Chronic Disease Management
- Client Communication and Education
- Dental Health and Oral Care
- Dermatology
- Diversity and Inclusion in Veterinary Practice
- Emergency and Critical Care
- End-of-Life Care and Euthanasia
- Epidemiology
- Geriatric Care
- Hereditary Diseases
- Infectious Disease Management
- Internal Medicine
- Microbiology, parasitology, and immunology
- Therapeutics
- Nutrition and Diet
- Oncology
- One Health
- Pain Management and Anesthesia

- Pathology and clinical pathology
- Pet Behaviour
- Pet Population & Reproduction Control
- Pharmacy Management
- Practice Management and Entrepreneurship
- Preventive Care
- Professional Development and Wellbeing for the Veterinary Team
- Veterinary Practice Accreditation
- Surgery
- Telemedicine and Digital Health