

Working with Animals

Are you considering a career working with animals? There are many different jobs you could consider. People who work with animals often have a particular set of skills. Read this checklist and think about how many of these skills you have? Can you recall a time you have demonstrated each skill you have ticked or how you could work on those you haven't ticked?

Empathy - you need to be able to understand how an animal is feeling, particularly if you want to work with sick animals or an animal that has been mistreated. Consideration of what the animal has been through will help you understand how they will react to you or any treatment being administered. You need to make them feel safe and comfortable.

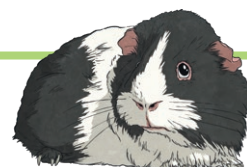
Patience and gentleness - animals have a natural need to protect themselves from potential attackers. They may initially be scared of you so you will need to slowly earn their trust by taking care of them. If you are working with sick animals, they may be in pain and will require you to be gentle as well as patient. Animals need time to adapt to their new environment.

Knowledge and training - most jobs with animals will require you to have some formal qualifications in animal care. There is a lot of competition for jobs working with animals so find some volunteer work, such as at an animal sanctuary, to show how committed you are to working with animals. You will need experience in working with animals; you will need to be able to read their body language and handle them correctly. You also need knowledge of animal safeguarding.

Communication skills - nearly all jobs require good communication skills. Working closely with other people will enable everyone to do what is best for the animal. As a vet or veterinary nurse, you would need to talk sympathetically and listen carefully to pet owners who may be upset when their much loved pet is ill. You also need to discuss the animal's care with other staff. Pet shop staff need a polite manner with customers when helping them with their queries and offering advice.

Resilience - to be resilient means being tough even when things are difficult. Working with animals often means you will see very poorly or mistreated animals. If you are sensitive to animals' suffering, then you may find working with animals distressing. Many animal jobs involve working outside throughout the year, which can be hard when it is very cold or very hot. It is also physically demanding work.

So which jobs can you consider when working with animals?



Veterinary Surgeon

There are different types of veterinary surgeons (vets), who focus on different areas of animal science. Here are some of them:

Small animal veterinarians

These are vets who look after people's pets and are the most common type of vet.

Veterinary specialists

A vet may choose to specialise in a particular area of veterinary science, such as dentistry or surgery or in a particular animal, such as cats or horses. They can also act as consultants for other vets if they have a specific expertise.

Large or food animal veterinarians

They specialise in looking after animals that are being raised for their meat. These vets ensure that the animals are free from diseases that could spread to humans who eat their meat, are being kept in clean conditions and treat and diagnose illnesses. These vets mostly work on farms and travel extensively.

Research veterinarians

These vets spend their time researching in order to be able to better diagnose, treat and prevent health conditions. They then pass this research on to other vets, who can use the information to help the animals they care for. They often work at universities and teach trainee vets or for government agencies and pharmaceutical companies.

Typical Day



A vet's day will depend on the type of vet they are. Let's take a look at a typical day in the life of a small animal veterinarian.

Most vets arrive at their surgery early. They will check emails and deal with any outstanding paperwork. They may need to compile a list of animal owners who need to be contacted by receptionists during the day with the results of any tests that have come back overnight.

The day is then spent in consultations with owners and their animals - often in a morning then an afternoon clinic. Animals could be suffering with a wide range of illnesses, from small infections to serious conditions that require surgery. Occasionally

an animal may be so poorly that euthanasia (killing an animal without pain) is the only option. During the day the vet may also need to take x-rays, re-examine animals, take blood tests and interpret the results - keeping owners updated on any animals left at the surgery for treatment. They have to deal with a wide variety of animals and people. The animals may be in pain and could scratch or bite as they will often be afraid of the vet. Pets owners may also be extremely upset so vets need to be confident working with people as well as animals. Emergencies may come in each day for animals that have suddenly taken poorly. During the day vets also perform surgery between clinics.



Qualifications Needed

You will need a degree approved by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. These degrees normally take five years to complete. To secure a place on one of these degrees, you would usually need five GCSEs at grade 9-4 (A* - C). These would need to include English, maths and science. You would also need three A levels, or equivalent, including biology and chemistry. Veterinary science is a popular course so you would need very good grades in your A levels. It is important to always check with the university the grades and subjects they require.

Average Annual Salary



Starting at:	£30,000 - £50,000
Salaries increase with further specialist qualifications and experience.	

Further Research

You can find out more about being a vet from the [Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons](#) and the [British Veterinary Association](#). You can also watch this video on YouTube [What's a career as a Veterinary Surgeon like?](#) where Katherine talks about being a vet.

Veterinary Nurse

Veterinary nurses provide care for animals being treated at a veterinary surgery. They work alongside vets. They also educate pet owners on how to care for their animals to keep the animals healthy. Veterinary nurses carry out diagnostic tests, administer medical treatments and may even carry out minor surgery under the guidance of a vet.

Typical Day



A veterinary nurse's typical day will involve supporting pet owners who may be upset, preparing animals for surgery and assisting the vet during the operations by preparing equipment correctly. They will administer medicine to animals, which may be via tablets or injections and take measurements such as temperature, pulse and respiration. Veterinary nurses also apply bandages to wounds, observe animals for pain and educate owners on how to prevent animals becoming sick.

Qualifications Needed

The **vocational training** route involves taking a Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing which can be undertaken full time at a college or as an apprenticeship when working in a job at a veterinary practice. This hands-on route offers practical experience. Some colleges require you to have a job in a veterinary practice before offering you a place on their course. Most colleges will require you to have five GCSE's grade 4, (C or equivalent) and above, in order to enrol on the course. It is important to check with the individual college as these requirements can vary.

The **higher education** route involves going to university to study a degree in veterinary nursing. This academic route still includes experience of working in a veterinary surgery. Students of higher education may have more career opportunities in research, the pharmaceutical industry (working with drug development) and teaching. You will need A levels, or equivalent, to be awarded a place on a degree course. The A levels you need will be determined by the university; you can find this information from the university's website. It is important to check with the university directly to see which qualifications they will accept for a place on any course.



Average Annual Salary



Starting at:	£17,000 - £23,000
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Further Research

You can read more about veterinary nursing as a career on the RCVS website [I want to be a veterinary nurse](#) and watch this video on YouTube [Day in the life of a veterinary nurse](#).

Zookeeper

Zookeepers care for animals in a wildlife park, zoo, aquarium or places where wild animals are kept. They are responsible for the care of animals, usually specialising in either a particular group of animals, such as reptiles or a specific species, such as lions.

Zookeepers may also be required to help with educating the public about the animals they care for through talks or workshops.

Typical Day

Working as a zookeeper is a demanding job that involves working outside in all weathers and is highly physical.



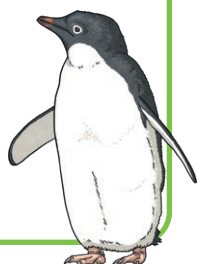
Every day the animals' food has to be prepared (which often involves lifting heavy sacks of fruit and vegetables), animals have to be fed, their water changed and the enclosures have to be cleaned. Zookeepers may also be expected to administer medicine to any sick animals, keep records of behaviour, eating habits, births and deaths as well as keep the park surroundings neat and tidy through general gardening duties. Zookeepers have to think up ideas for enrichment activities which prevent the animals from becoming bored in their enclosures. They may need to not only design these but also build and maintain them. They monitor the animals for signs of distress or ill health.

Qualifications Needed

Zookeeper jobs have strong competition because working with fascinating animals in a zoo is popular. You usually need a higher education qualification in order to be considered for a job as a zookeeper.

Examples of this are a diploma in Management of Zoo and Aquarium Animals or a degree in Zoology. To study for a diploma in Management of Zoo and Aquarium Animals, you will usually need five GCSE's at grade 9-4 (A* - C) including maths, English and at least one science subject at grade 9-6 (A* - B). These requirements can vary and it is best to check with individual colleges to see which qualifications they require.

To study for a degree in zoology, you will normally need A levels. Again, it is important to check the entry requirements for the university you would like to attend as requirements can vary.



Average Annual Salary



Starting at:	£16,000
You may be provided with accommodation on site that can either be free or subsidised.	

Further Research



You can find out more about life as a zookeeper by watching this video on YouTube [A Day in the Life of a Zookeeper](#). Many zoo websites also contain information about how to start a career working with them.

Check out [Chester Zoo](#) and the [Royal Zoological Society of Scotland](#) for more information.

Animal Care Worker

Animal Care Workers work in kennels, sanctuaries and rescue centres. They could be working with abandoned pets, looking after animals whose owners have gone on holiday or caring for wild animals who have been injured before returning them to the wild. They are responsible for the care of animals that may have been abused or neglected. As a result, you must have a love of animals, be gentle and patient and also understand that some animals may have problematic behaviour due to the way they have been treated by humans in the past. You will have to earn their trust and have an excellent understanding of animal behaviour. The work is physically demanding and emotionally challenging.

Typical Day



Animal Care Workers have days that will look different depending on the type of animals they are caring for. Usual duties could include grooming, washing and exercising animals. They will also prepare food, administer medication and clear out the animals' living area. Some roles may involve dealing with the public, for example, if they work in a rehoming centre for pets.

Qualifications Needed

No formal qualifications are required for Animal Care Worker roles, although some employers may ask for certain GCSE's, or look favourably on candidates with a Level 2 or 3 qualification in Animal Welfare or Management. Animal Care Workers need to be able to show they are passionate about working with animals and that they are hard workers as the job is demanding. Volunteering is a great way into an Animal Care Worker role, building up experience with animals. Many employers enrol Animal Care Workers for work-based training once they have a job with them.

Average Annual Salary



£11,000 - £17,000

(although many sanctuary and rescue workers are volunteers).

Further Research

The best way to find out more about these roles would be to research specific charities and organisations. You can find some examples on the [RSPCA website](#) and [The Donkey Sanctuary](#).

Careers with Animals

Do you like the sound of any of these jobs? Select the one that interests you the most and complete this form to record your ideas and areas for further research.

Job Title:

What does this job involve?

What do I think I would enjoy about this job?

What do I think I would not enjoy about this job?

What skills do I have that would help me to do this job?

What qualifications would I need to apply for this job?

What are the next steps in order to prepare myself for doing this job?

There are many other roles working with animals. Here are some you might like to research. Look at the [National Careers Service](#) website for job descriptions, [UCAS](#) for advice on post-16 qualifications and individual organisations' websites for careers information. You may want to look into:

RSPCA Inspector

Wildlife Documentary Production

Marine Biologist

Police Dog Handler

Zoologist

Pet Shop Staff

Education Officer

Assistance Dog Trainer

Animal Behaviourist

Dog Walker



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