

CCOAS Fitness to Practise and Study Policy

Central College of Animal Studies strives to deliver the highest quality training qualifications within the veterinary profession, including other relevant professional skills like communication, team work, confidence and resilience so that student veterinary nurses can be prepared for registration.

As a future member of a regulated profession, the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses sets out the professional standards that must be upheld in order to be registered to practise in the UK. <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-nurses/>

Further guidance can be found in the RCVS Fitness to Practise: A Guide for UK Providers of Veterinary Nursing Education and Student Veterinary Nurses, a copy of which is included in the electronic pack received at induction; a printed copy is also displayed in the notice board. <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/fitness-to-practise-a-guide-for-uk-providers-of-veterinary/?destination=%2Fnews-and-views/publications%2F>

What does it mean 'Fitness to Practise'?

Being fit to practise requires student veterinary nurses to have, when qualified, the skills, knowledge and appropriate behaviours so they are able to do their job safely and effectively.

By holding a position of trust and responsibility, fitness to practise applies to both professional and private life to ensure they do not bring the profession into disrepute.

Why is Fitness to Practise relevant to my training as a veterinary nurse?

Trainee veterinary nurses represent the veterinary nursing profession and they interact, throughout their training, with animals, members of the public and members of staff. They must be of good character, responsible, trustworthy and gain the confidence of the members of the public as well as their professional peers.

For that reason, the College has a responsibility to address any concerns regarding fitness to practise and, those found 'not-fit to practise' might find themselves facing a Fitness to Practise investigation which can lead, after an 'adverse finding', to a sanction that might affect registration as it must be disclosed to the RCVS on registration

Why is Fitness to Practise important?

The following are some examples where the student or registered veterinary nurse's behaviour can compromise:

- Protection of animal welfare
- Protection of the public
- Proper standards of conduct
- Compliance with relevant legislation: animal welfare legislation, equality and discrimination legislation, etc
- Public confidence in the profession
- The reputation of the professions
- The wider public interest

How is the decision made when commencing Fitness to Practise proceedings?

When a concern is identified, the College's academic and disciplinary procedures would come into place and, based on the situation, a fitness to practise investigation may or may not take place.

The following would be considered regarding the concern:

- Meeting the minimum standards of practise safely and effectively

- Age and level of training
- Level of insight regarding their actions
- The member of the public perspective on the concern
- Whether deliberate or reckless behaviour

Who can report a concern?

Concerns or allegations may be raised by:

- Self-referral by the student themselves
- Fellow students
- College staff
- Practice staff
- Other paraprofessionals
- Awarding body/Inspections staff
- Members of the public
- The police
- Anonymous sources

What happens if a Fitness to Practise concern is raised?

There are 2 stages:

- **Investigation**- this is the stage where evidence will be gathered by an appointed Fitness to Practise Investigator who will be appointed at the time and, to ensure the process is fair, it will be a member of staff unrelated to the concern.

The investigator will gather evidence with accurate records and a report will be produced where it will be clearly stated whether the case should be referred for adjudication or not.

If it is referred, the student veterinary nurse will get written notice of the allegation and a copy of the evidence against them. They will also be informed how they may respond and the timeline of the process as well as a reminder of their rights and sources of support

- **Adjudication**- this is the stage where the evidence is reviewed by a Fitness to Practise Panel comprising of 3 people who are sufficiently independent and have no significant previous involvement with the student.

The student will be given the opportunity to respond and all evidence reviewed, including from witnesses as appropriate, before the decision whether the student's fitness to practise is impaired, and, if so, what sanction is required

If there is an adverse finding, what are the possible sanctions?

The appropriate sanction will be determined by the Fitness to Practise Panel and could include:

- Accepting a sanction proposed by the student
- Imposing conditions on the student
- Requiring the student to re-take part of the course
- Suspending the student from the course
- Terminating the student's place on the course

Depending on the individual case, the RCVS and the Awarding Body might be informed at the conclusion of proceedings

Can the decision be appealed?

Yes. If the student has concerns about how their case was investigated, or how the decision was made they can bring an appeal as per college protocols.

The student may also raise concerns with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for students in higher education (OIA) www.oiahe.org.uk

What types of concern might be considered under Fitness to Practise?

They are mainly classified under 3 headings

- **Student's performance**- the concern may need to be considered under the disciplinary policy unless it is regarding serious issues (see professional behaviours concerns below)
- **Student's conduct**- again, the concern may need to be considered under the disciplinary policy unless it is regarding unacceptable behaviour (see professional behaviours concerns below)
- **Student's health**- concerns may arise from matters related to a student's physical or mental health, and may involve substance abuse

Whilst these kinds of concerns will be managed during the course with regular tutorials, reviews and adjustments, they might need to be pursued as a fitness to practise matter where the students show minimal insight into their health and its implications, and/or where they fail to follow the agreed actions and reviews

What behaviours can call Fitness to Practise into question?

The following are some examples of concerning behaviours in the context of three key areas: people, private and student life, and practise.

PEOPLE: this includes members of the public, other students, staff at college/practice etc

- Breaching client confidentiality
- Persistent rudeness and general lack of courtesy
- Inappropriate, disparaging, offensive, aggressive or violent behaviour
- Failure to follow a colleague's instructions or client requests
- Going beyond the scope of client consent
- Dishonesty, including outside the professional role

PRIVATE & STUDENT LIFE: conduct outside the professional environment

- Substance misuse: drugs and alcohol
- Criminal convictions or cautions: to be disclosed at interview and during yearly induction
- Failure to seek medical treatment or other support
- Refusal to follow medical advice or treatment plans
- Cheating in examinations
- Plagiarising coursework and assessments and passing off other people's work as your own
- Forging a signature: clinical coach, veterinary surgeon, tutor...
- Submitting fraudulent CVs, application forms and employment references
- Misuse of social media (see below)

PRACTICE: outside Schedule 3 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 conditions

- Undertaking tasks beyond the scope of Schedule 3
- Lacking insight into your limitations and lack of experience
- Deliberately ignoring instructions or advice
- Taking unnecessary risks and compromising animal welfare
- Independently prescribing, supplying or administering medicines
- Accessing the controlled drugs cabinet without permission
- Accessing and sharing practise documents without the practise's consent
- Falsely completing/signing documentation

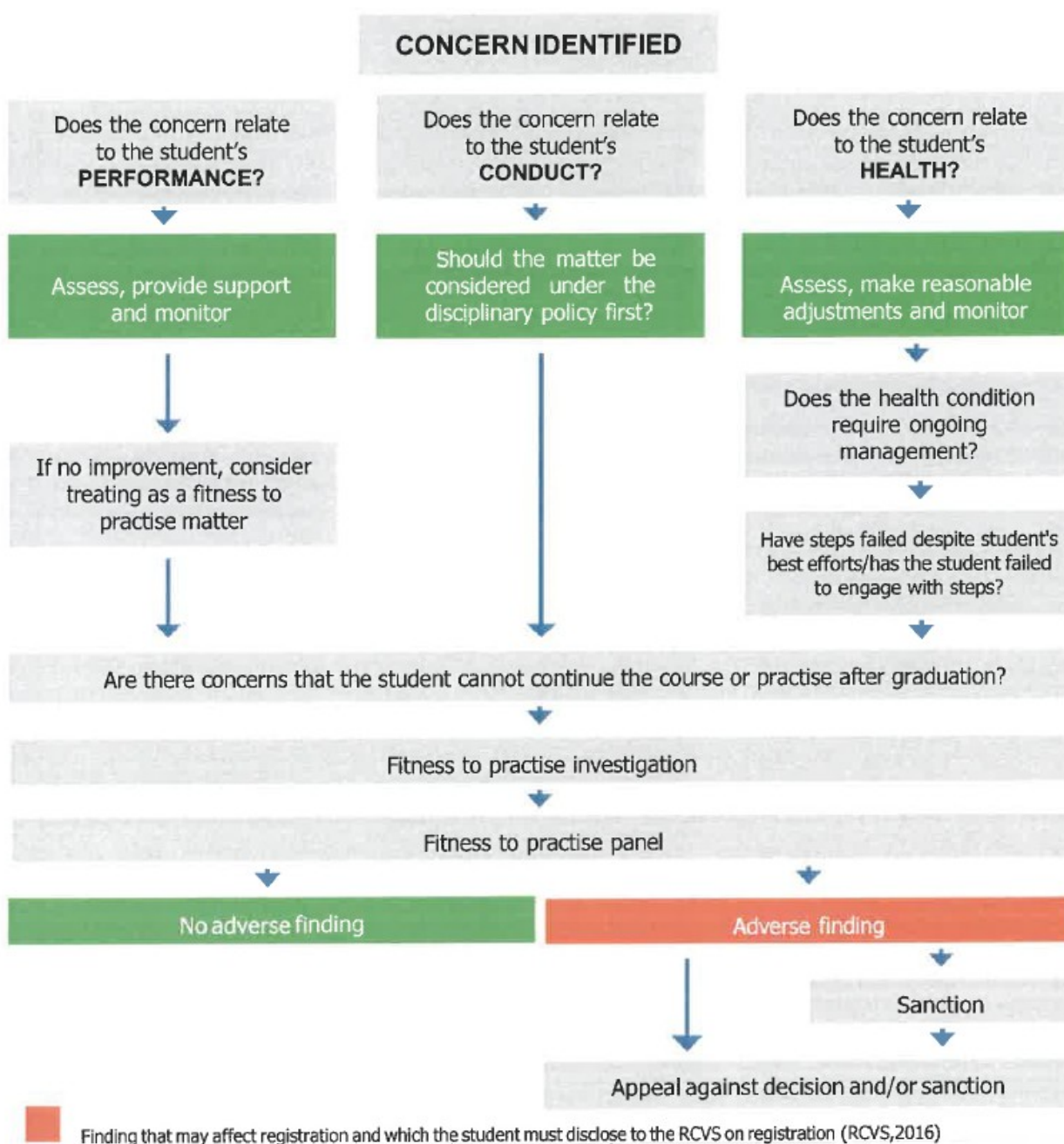
Why should I be mindful when using social media?

Social media is part of everyday student life but they have the responsibility to behave professionally and responsibly when offline and online at all times. Veterinary nurses, including

students, may put their registration at risk if they demonstrate inappropriate behaviour and misuse social media

When using social media you should avoid making, posting or facilitating statements, images or videos that:

- Contravene the College's Netiquette and Social Media Policy
- Cause undue distress or provoke anti-social or violent behaviour
- Are offensive, false, inaccurate or unjustified
- Abuse, bully, victimise, harass, threaten or intimidate fellow students, colleagues, staff or others
- Discriminate against an individual based on their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or beliefs or national origin



FITNESS TO STUDY

What does it mean 'Fitness to Study'?

Whilst at college, students should be **fit to study** and perform to the best of their ability and we are committed to support them throughout their journey. If there are serious concerns about your health, safety and wellbeing or the safety and wellbeing of other students or members of staff as a consequence of your behaviour (which can severely impact our teaching, support and administrative processes), it can lead to disciplinary action based on Fitness to Study.

What types of concern might be considered under Fitness to Study?

The general expectations are embedded in the Learner Contract that students sign every year during induction. Here are some examples:

- behaviour during attendance at teaching, learning or support events (in person or online) prevents the effective delivery of the objectives of the learning session
- staff have reason to believe the behaviours contrary to the Learner Contract are influenced by a physical or mental health issue and were attempting to meet your needs requires support beyond the reasonable adjustment defined in the Equality Act 2010, or where you do not engage with us to help meet your needs
- not able or willing to engage with study, as shown by not responding to communications from staff and/or not submitting assignments and assessment tasks

What happens if a Fitness to Study concern is raised?

The CCOAS Disciplinary Policy will be implemented unless the concern applies to Fitness to Practise. In that case the Fitness to Practise disciplinary process will take precedence.

The seriousness of the breach of conduct will determine the stage at which the process starts.

Stage	Stage name	Staff	Document	Additional information
1	Tutorial	Tutor	Tutorial form	Up to 3 discussions on same issue before next stage
2	Verbal warning	Centre Liaison	Student Concern Notice	Up to 3 concern notices before next stage Copy sent to the practice
3	Written warning	Head of Learning	Formal letter	By email and recorded delivery. Copy sent to the practice
4	Dismissal	College Principal	Dismissal letter	Recorded delivery. Copy sent to the practice

Suspension- A student may be suspended either during a period of investigation in relation to a particular incident or as part of a "cooling off" period following unacceptable behaviour.

Appeal Against Dismissal- A student who is dismissed from the college shall have the right to appeal against their dismissal. Any appeal must be submitted in writing to the principal within seven working days of receiving the letter.

Any incidence of dealing or using illegal substances will result in a 999 call to the Police and instant exclusion.

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