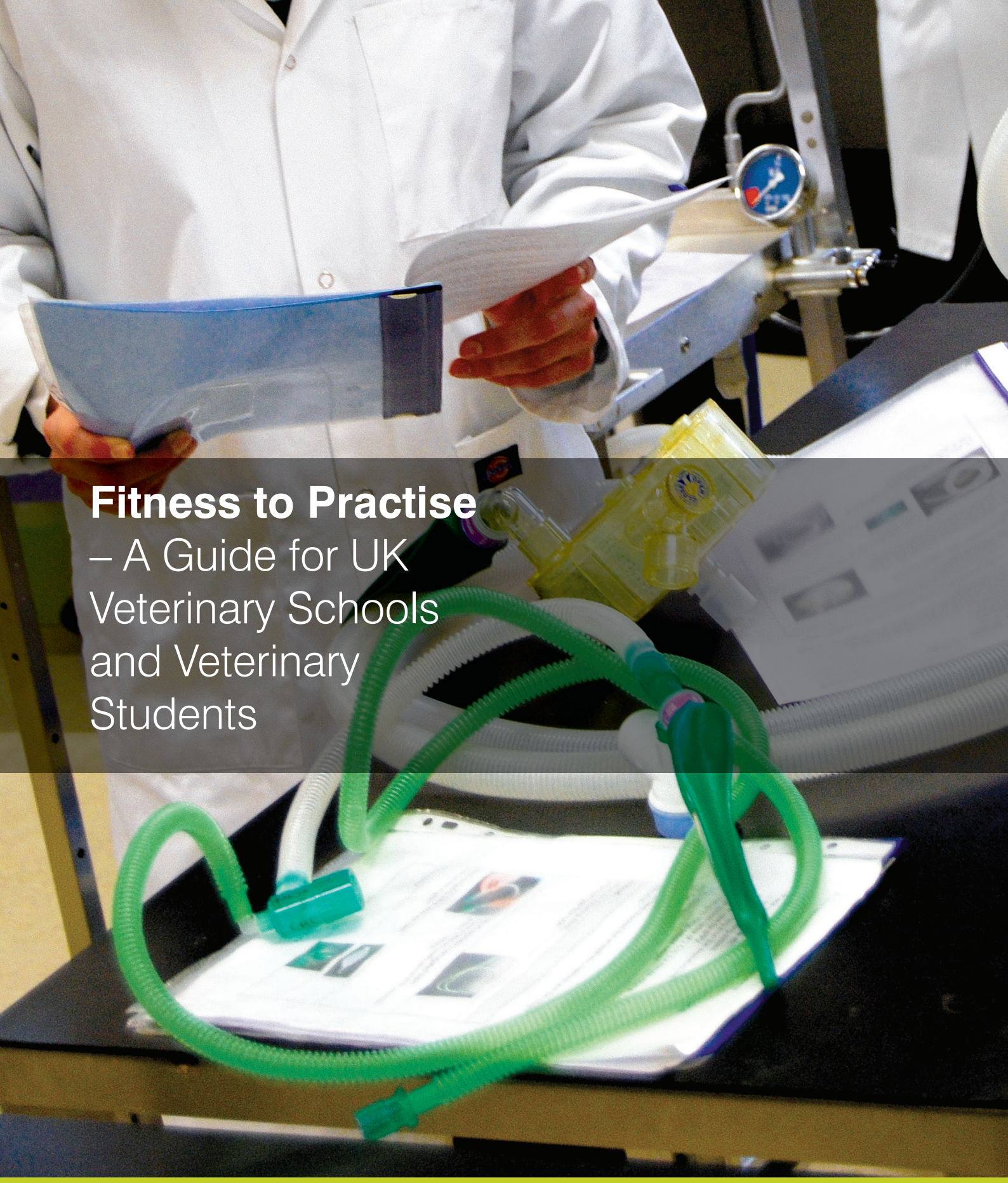

Fitness to Practise – A Guide for UK Veterinary Schools and Veterinary Students

VSC
Veterinary Schools Council

RCVS
SETTING VETERINARY STANDARDS

The RCVS in conjunction with the UK veterinary schools*

***The UK veterinary schools that offer an RCVS-approved degree are:**

Royal Veterinary College
University of Bristol
University of Cambridge
University of Edinburgh
University of Glasgow
University of Liverpool
University of Nottingham

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Introduction

Veterinary students have responsibilities and privileges beyond those of most other student bodies. Trust is placed in veterinary students to conduct their studies and training competently, professionally and with integrity. The veterinary student is expected to represent the future of the profession and they must be prepared for life in practice in a public-facing role.

The concept of being fit to practise is not just about achieving academic qualifications; it is about being of good character, being responsible and being worthy of the trust and confidence of the public and peers. In order to maintain that trust and confidence, veterinary students must behave in a manner that upholds the reputation of the profession and promotes animal welfare. In short, veterinary students must conduct themselves professionally at all times.

Veterinary schools have a responsibility to ensure that veterinary students are given the opportunity to develop their skills in a supportive environment, and must address any fitness to practise concerns.

This guide to student fitness to practise is produced for the benefit of veterinary schools and veterinary students. It has been produced by a Working Party of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and all seven of the UK veterinary schools that offer an RCVS-approved veterinary degree, each of whom have adopted the guidance and agreed to follow its principles. The Veterinary Schools Council was not part of the Working Party but they also support the guidance. The veterinary schools will publicise this guide to their students.

The guide is split into two parts.
Part one provides guidance for the veterinary schools on recognising and addressing fitness to practise concerns. The RCVS does not seek to prescribe a 'one-size fits all' procedure but hopes to promote consistency across the veterinary schools. It is understood that veterinary schools will have in place their own specific guidelines and procedures for dealing with individual fitness to practise cases, and that these will be informed by the principles within this guide.

Part two sets out broad principles of fitness to practise which students should follow and which veterinary schools should expect and uphold. The RCVS has no powers to regulate veterinary students but hopes that its future members are prepared for the requirements of being a member of a regulated profession and abiding by a code of professional conduct.

November 2014

Part one

Recognising fitness to practise concerns and addressing them appropriately

This section provides guidance for the veterinary schools on recognising and addressing fitness to practise concerns.

What is fitness to practise?

Professionals hold a position of trust and responsibility. The public expects professionals to conduct themselves in a way that justifies this trust and fellow professionals rely on their peers to uphold their profession's good reputation. Fitness to practise is about students demonstrating, in both their professional and private life, that they can practise their profession properly, safely and with respect for the trust and responsibility placed upon them.

The concept of fitness to practise applies to students who will enter the regulated professions not only because of the special position they are in throughout their studies, but also because the regulatory bodies need to be satisfied that its incoming members can demonstrate good character upon entering the profession.

Recognising fitness to practise

Veterinary schools have a responsibility to monitor their students' fitness to practise and take appropriate action. Fitness to practise processes must be used fairly and sensibly.

Veterinary schools will have disciplinary procedures as well as fitness to practise procedures and consideration will need to be given to which is appropriate in a particular situation. It is possible for a matter to amount to a disciplinary issue without raising fitness to practise concerns, and vice versa. In some circumstances, an issue may require both disciplinary action and consideration under fitness to practise procedures. In these cases, the disciplinary investigation should be completed first.

Where there is a serious or repeated concern about a student's ability to continue their course or their ability to practise after graduation, it is advisable for the veterinary school to instigate a fitness to practise investigation. However, the following factors should be considered when deciding whether to commence fitness to practise proceedings:

- A student is not a fully-fledged professional
  While high standards are expected of both students and qualified professionals, when it comes to matters of practice in particular, allowances for learning and mistakes may be required. In a similar vein, consideration of the student's age and year of study may be relevant. In some circumstances, what may be of significant concern in a student approaching graduation may be more excusable and of less concern in a first-year student.

- Insight
  When conduct or behaviour raises potential fitness to practise concerns, the student in question may not understand the implications of what they have done. A failure to understand why something calls fitness to practise into question can be of concern in itself, as it may indicate an inability to appreciate risk and, in turn, a potential for repetition of the behaviour.

  Insight goes beyond showing remorse and regret, it is about understanding why particular conduct or behaviour potentially calls fitness to practise into question and what steps are required to remedy any shortcomings, as well as a willingness to engage with such steps. Insight may be demonstrated by self-reporting of concerns and engagement with any investigations. The veterinary school may consider that the student's insight is relevant to the treatment of the concern and the student's progression through the fitness to practise process. Insight must not, however, distract those responsible for pursuing fitness to practise concerns from investigating serious concerns. In some cases, despite the student having insight, the public interest may require a thorough investigation into potential fitness to practise concerns. In all cases, insight may be taken into account at the sanction stage as a mitigating factor.

- The public element
  Understandably, deliberate or reckless behaviour, whether or not it causes harm or adverse consequences, is likely to raise concerns about a student's fitness to practise, unlike an incident which simply involves an accident. To practise safely as a veterinary surgeon requires sound judgement, an ability to appreciate risk and an appreciation of the public trust and confidence in the profession. Deliberate or reckless behaviour, particularly where this results in harm, is highly likely to undermine the public's trust and confidence and, in most instances of such behaviour, it would be hard to justify not conducting a fitness to practise investigation.

  It must be borne in mind that fitness to practise is not about punishment; it is about ensuring that animals and their owners are protected from risk.

Fair process

To question a student's fitness to practise is a serious matter; the consequences for the student could be significant. Those responsible for conducting investigations and making decisions must act with probity; balancing fairness towards the student subject to the investigation and the public interest in a thorough investigation.

Veterinary schools should assess each case on its own merits but, as far as possible, it is desirable to act consistently. It is also advisable for processes and decisions to be transparent.

Veterinary students should be informed about their school's fitness to practise process and the circumstances in which concerns may be raised. Efforts should be made to reassure students that concerns will be dealt with fairly; this may encourage students to speak up if they have concerns about their own fitness to practise, as well as their peers. An efficient and effective fitness to practise process relies upon the reporting of concerns without a culture of fear.

The following factors are fundamental to a fair process:

- ✓ Full and accessible advice for all parties about the process and timescales
- ✓ Clear communication and regular updates for all parties throughout the investigation
- ✓ Separation of those conducting investigations and those making decisions
- ✓ Maintenance of accurate records, stored safely and in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998
- ✓ Traning for those making decisions
- ✓ Decisions made on the basis of one standard of proof – 'on the balance of probabilities*
- ✓ Decision on impairment made before considering sanction and mitigation
- ✓ Provision of full reasons for decisions and sanctions, with clear written determinations and/or outcome letters
- ✓ Sanctions imposed using the principle of proportionality and considered in ascending order of severity
- ✓ Hearings to be properly recorded by way of transcripts or minutes
- ✓ Existence of an appeals process and information on this publicised

**The standard of proof adopted in RCVS disciplinary hearings is different and is so that the Disciplinary Committee is sure, which is tantamount to the criminal standard. While every effort has been made to ensure that veterinary students and veterinary surgeons are subject to fitness to practise procedures with the same general principles, the RCVS recognises that veterinary schools have their own procedures (including the standard of proof) which are established and aligned with other professional student bodies.*

Veterinary schools should be aware that students with concerns about how their case has been investigated, or the decision made, may raise these with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA), although of course the student must first pursue their complaint through the school's appeal process. There is further guidance on running a fair process on the OIA's website – (**www.oiahe.org.uk**).

Managing risk

Veterinary schools should recognise that being subject to a fitness to practise investigation can be a daunting and stressful experience. As such, students should be offered independent support throughout the course of the investigation. A peer support programme, for example, is a valuable service and is one of a number of ways of providing support to students. Veterinary schools should also bear in mind that students raising concerns about their peers may well have worries and concerns, and support should also be offered to these students.

A fair fitness to practise process cannot be rushed and will take time. In some cases, however, the concerns will be very serious and there may be a real concern that the behaviour will be repeated, with the potential to cause harm to animals or the public. In these cases, very careful consideration will be needed to assess whether interim measures are required to minimise any risks, such as restrictions on the practical elements of the course or even temporary suspension from the course. If it is considered that interim measures are required, these should be proportionate to the level of risk and should be periodically assessed for suitability as the substantive investigation progresses.

NB The RCVS does not have powers to impose interim measures on veterinary surgeons under investigation. While

every effort has been made to ensure that veterinary students and veterinary surgeons are subject to fitness to practise procedures with the same general principles, the RCVS recognises that veterinary schools may have this power and will exercise it as they see fit.

Making decisions

An investigator will decide whether there is sufficient evidence to suggest that a student's fitness to practise is impaired, such that the case should be referred to an independent panel. The panel will then decide whether or not fitness to practise is impaired in accordance with their guidelines. If they decide that fitness to practise is impaired, the panel must then make a decision on an appropriate and proportionate sanction. Full and clear reasons for the decision and sanctions, with clear written determinations and/or outcome letters, should be given.

At the stage of considering an appropriate and proportionate sanction, the fitness to practise panel should consider any aggravating or mitigating factors.

Graduation

Academic achievement and practical competence do not guarantee the award of a veterinary degree; a student must be able to demonstrate fitness to practise in all respects at the point of graduation. It is not possible to award the veterinary degree with caveats or restrictions. A student may not be able to graduate until the conclusion of any fitness to practice investigation.

Health and performance

Some concerns may arise from matters related to a student's physical/mental health or performance. Ideally, such matters will be identified and addressed before they become fitness to practise concerns, with appropriate input and support from the vet school, which may include occupational health, student support and personal tutors.

This guidance focuses primarily on veterinary students who have already enrolled on a course. However, it is worth pointing out that in many cases, a student's health condition or disability will have been disclosed and carefully considered at the stage of initial application and selection for the course. The Veterinary Surgeons Act requires veterinary surgeons to be able to give at least basic and emergency treatment to all common domestic species. The RCVS sets and monitors standards of veterinary degree courses in the UK, but it is the veterinary schools that are responsible for selecting the students they admit to their courses. Veterinary students are encouraged to discuss in advance their disabilities with the veterinary schools to which they intend to apply, and to keep their school updated on any developments during the course.

Veterinary schools should familiarise themselves with the RCVS 'Guidance on admission of students with disabilities to the professional degree course'. Additionally, veterinary schools may have their own internal disabilities guidance with which they should comply. For reference, veterinary schools may also find it helpful to read the General Medical Council's Gateways Guidance, which provides practical advice to medical schools on how to accommodate and support students with disabilities and health conditions.

Reasonable adjustments may have been made to enable the student to access the course and demonstrate their skills and competence. However, for some students, a health condition or disability that may affect their ability to continue the course or practise after graduation may arise during their studies. It must be borne in mind that graduation is linked to practice and so consideration should be given to whether it would be possible to recreate any reasonable adjustments made by the veterinary school in a practice setting.

In addition to the requirements of the vet schools, students should take responsibility for their own physical and mental health; part of being fit to practise is recognising when your own health has the potential to jeopardise your ability to practise safely and effectively.

Health conditions (physical and mental) are likely to require sensitive management throughout the student's progression along the course, with regular discussions, reviews and evaluations of any adjustments made. Students should ensure that they attend their medical appointments and keep the university updated on any significant developments that may affect the adjustments put in place, or indeed their ability to continue the course safely. In addition, students should be willing to engage in any assessments that may reasonably be required to ensure effective monitoring of their health and any adjustments.

It is anticipated and understood that in most cases, health matters will not raise formal fitness to practise concerns. If, for whatever reason, despite adjustments being made and all reasonable avenues explored, concerns remain about a student's fitness to practise, it would be advisable to pursue the matter through the fitness to practise process. This is of particular importance in cases where the student fails to engage with treatment or shows no insight into their health condition. The safety of animals, the public and other students and lecturers is paramount.

Beyond student fitness to practise

Veterinary students who successfully complete their course and wish to practise in the UK must apply to be registered with the RCVS.

Since January 2014, everyone who applies to be registered with the RCVS will need to declare any cautions, convictions or adverse findings which may affect registration (see RCVS Protocol on Handling Convictions – **www.rcvs.org.uk/convictions**).

An 'adverse finding' includes any finding within veterinary school or university fitness to practise procedures. To clarify, we require disclosure where a panel finds that the case against the student is proven and their fitness to practise is impaired. We do not need to know about cases that do not reach a fitness to practise panel or those that are dismissed by a panel.

The current rules only require self-declaration by the applicant; there is no duty on the veterinary school to notify the RCVS if a student has been subject to a university fitness to practise investigation.

When a disclosure is made to the RCVS, the Registrar will decide whether the student is suitable for registration. The Registrar may seek additional information from the relevant veterinary school or university in order to consider the matter declared by the student.

Veterinary students should therefore be aware of this requirement and the potential significance of any outcomes of student fitness to practise investigations. Likewise, veterinary schools and universities should make accurate records of their investigations and decisions and cooperate with reasonable requests for information from the RCVS in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Should the RCVS be notified of a health concern, we are able to provide support to the applicant. We recognise that generally close monitoring and guidance will have been provided to the student by the veterinary school and that without a commitment by us to continue this, the student may feel apprehensive about applying to register and enter practice. We are therefore keen to support new applicants. We have a Health Protocol (**see www.rcvs.org.uk/health**) which enables us to take a proactive and medical approach. The RCVS recognises that sometimes it will be in the public interest to deal with veterinary surgeons suffering from adverse health without referring a case to the Disciplinary Committee (DC) for a formal hearing. Generally, it is more appropriate to take a medical approach in cases involving medical problems.

There may also be situations where disclosure regarding university fitness to practise investigations will need to be made to other organisations, in accordance with their disclosure requirements. This may be the case where a veterinary student applies for registration with another professional body.

Part two

Principles of behaviour for veterinary students

This section is for veterinary students and sets out broad principles of fitness to practise that they should follow and which veterinary schools should expect and uphold.

It is not possible or desirable to provide an exhaustive list of the types of professional behaviours that are expected of you as a veterinary student, or those that could call your fitness to practise into question. This guide therefore sets out broad principles and example behaviours expected of you in the context of three key areas of the study of veterinary medicine.

The principles set out in this guide are informed by some of the key principles of the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons (Table 1). The Code sets out veterinary surgeons' professional responsibilities. RCVS supporting guidance provides further advice on the proper standards of professional practice. The Code and supporting guidance are essential for veterinary surgeons in their professional lives and are fundamental to the RCVS regulatory process (**www.rcvs.org.uk/vetcode**).

The Code of Professional Conduct will apply to you when you register as a veterinary surgeon with the RCVS. Although you are not yet qualified or registered as a veterinary surgeon, or subject to RCVS jurisdiction, you should familiarise yourself with the Code and aim to follow its general principles. You should also familiarise yourself with the RCVS Day One Competences (DC1) (**www.rcvs.org.uk/education/approving-veterinary-degrees**). The DC1 set out, in broad terms, what is required of new veterinary graduates at the end of their veterinary degree, to prepare them for safe practice on day one of their professional career.

People

You will come into contact with a range of people in the course of your education and training. Maintaining working relationships is vital for practice and this will require effective communication skills and teamwork. You should begin to practise these skills with your fellow students, academic staff and supervisors.

Principles

- ✓ Professional accountability
- ✓ Honesty and integrity
- ✓ Independence and impartiality
- ✓ Client confidence and trust
- ✓ Respect

Behaviours

You can demonstrate you are fit to practise by:

- Communicating effectively with clients, the lay public, professional colleagues and responsible authorities; listening effectively and responding sympathetically to clients and others, using language in a form appropriate to the audience and the context
- Being open and honest with clients and respecting their needs and requirements
- Ensuring that you do not disclose information about a client to a third party, unless the client gives permission, or where animal welfare or the public interest may be compromised
- Working effectively as a member of a multi-disciplinary team in the delivery of services to clients

- Respecting the skills and experience of your supervisors and seeking their advice as appropriate
- Recognising diversity and respecting the cultural differences, values and beliefs of others, including fellow students, colleagues and staff
- Treating others politely, with consideration and with respect
- Recognising and respecting that other people may question your fitness to practise and demonstrating insight and engagement with associated investigations
- Being prepared to challenge the judgement of others if you have reason to believe their decisions could compromise animal welfare or safety

Concerns

Failing to demonstrate the above behaviours may raise questions about your fitness to practise. In addition, the following are examples of particular concerns that may affect your fitness to practise:

- × Breaching client confidentiality without proper justification
- × Inappropriate or offensive behaviour towards fellow students, colleagues or clients
- × Failure to respect a client's instructions or going beyond the scope of consent

Private and student life

The *RCVS Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons* provides that veterinary surgeons must not to engage in any activity or behaviour that would be likely to bring the profession into disrepute or undermine public confidence in the profession. As a veterinary student, you should also uphold the reputation of your chosen profession at all times and consider how your behaviour and conduct could affect the trust that the public places in the veterinary profession.

Fitness to practise encompasses not only your professional competence and practical skills, but also the way in which you conduct yourself outside the clinical environment. This includes your private life and student life.

Remember that wherever you are, you are representing the veterinary profession and your university.

Principles

- ✓ Honesty and integrity
- ✓ Maintenance of public trust and confidence
- ✓ Personal responsibility

Behaviours

You can demonstrate that you are fit to practise by:

- Taking responsibility for your own physical and mental health, seeking treatment and limiting practice if necessary, and communicating with your university
- Abiding by the rules and regulations of your university and other organisations linked to your studies
- Honouring commitments and taking responsibility for your work
- Attending mandatory teaching sessions or making alternative arrangements with the university
- Submitting academic work on time
- Not plagiarising the work of others
- Co-operating with formal investigations about you or others
- Disclosing to your veterinary school if you receive a police caution or criminal conviction during the course, in accordance with any relevant school policies

Concerns

Failing to demonstrate the above behaviours may raise questions about your fitness to practise. In addition, the following are examples of particular concerns that may affect your fitness to practise:

- × Aggressive, threatening or violent behaviour
- × Substance misuse eg drugs, alcohol and other substances that can impair performance
- × Dishonesty, cheating or plagiarising, including dishonesty outside the professional role
- × Criminal convictions or cautions
- × Misuse of social media (see section below for more detail)
- × Failure to seek medical treatment or other support
- × Refusal to follow medical advice or treatment plans

Practice

Veterinary students, as part of their clinical training, are required to undertake acts of veterinary surgery. The Veterinary Surgeons (Practice by Students) (Amendment) Regulations 1993 identify two categories of student: full-time undergraduate students in the clinical part of their course, and overseas veterinary surgeons whose declared intention is to sit the RCVS Statutory Examination for Membership within a reasonable time.

In accordance with the Regulations, veterinary students may examine animals, carry out diagnostic tests under the direction of a veterinary surgeon, administer treatment under the supervision of a veterinary surgeon and perform surgical operations under the direct and continuous personal supervision of a registered veterinary surgeon.

Although you are restricted by law on the clinical work you can do, you must act professionally and responsibly during your practical training. Under supervision, you will be trusted to work with animals and clients and you should be guided by the following principles of practice:

Principles

- ✓ Professional competence
- ✓ Honesty and integrity
- ✓ Independence and impartiality
- ✓ Client confidence and trust
- ✓ Professional accountability

Behaviours

You can demonstrate you are fit to practise by:

- Making animal health and welfare your primary consideration when attending to animals
- Taking responsibility for your working practices
- Conducting yourself in a professional manner with regard to professional and legal responsibilities
- Being aware of legislation relevant to the welfare of animals
- Working within the limits of your competence and ensuring that you do not go beyond the instructions of your supervisor
- Being aware of personal limitations, and demonstrating awareness of when and from where to seek professional advice, assistance and support
- When in doubt, seeking professional support and, in the interests of animal and human health, recognising that you should not perform complex procedures unsupervised
- Ensuring that you are appropriately supervised when performing clinical or surgical tasks
- Providing care that is appropriate and adequate
- Being aware of the ethical responsibilities of veterinary surgeons in relation to individual patient care and client relations
- Respecting and maintaining client confidentiality
- Reporting any concerns about colleagues or patients promptly and honestly and to the appropriate person
- Understanding the need and professional obligation for a commitment to continuing education, training and professional development throughout your professional life

Concerns

Failing to demonstrate the above behaviours may raise questions about your fitness to practise. In addition, the following are examples of particular concerns that may affect your fitness to practise:

- × Demonstrating a serious or persistent lack of insight into your limitations and lack of experience
- × Deliberately ignoring or failing to follow instructions or advice
- × Taking unnecessary risks and compromising animal welfare
- × Purporting to have qualifications you do not have
- × Falsely completing/signing documentation

Use of social media

'Social media' is the term used to describe websites and online applications that encourage social interaction between users and content creators. It encompasses all technology that can be used to share opinions and insights, information, knowledge, ideas and interests, and enables the building of communities and networks. Examples include media sites that allow public posts and comments (eg Twitter), content sharing websites (eg YouTube, Instagram and Flickr), professional and social networking sites (eg LinkedIn and Facebook), internet forums (eg vetsurgeon.org), discussion boards, blogs (Tumblr and Wordpress) and instant messaging.

It is recognised that social media are likely to form part of your everyday student life. They can be valuable communication tools and can enhance your personal and academic life. However, the use of social media is not without risk and you should be mindful of the consequences that may arise from its misuse.

Veterinary surgeons have a responsibility to behave professionally and responsibly when offline, online as themselves and online in a virtual capacity (perhaps as an avatar or under an alias). They may put their registration at risk if they demonstrate inappropriate behaviour when using social media. The same principles apply to veterinary students and you must uphold the reputation of your chosen profession at all times. You should be mindful that you may jeopardise your position at university and your subsequent ability to join the RCVS Register if you misuse social media.

When using social media, you should:

- ✓ Be respectful of and protect the privacy of others
- ✓ Be proactive in removing content that could be viewed as unprofessional
- ✓ Maintain and protect client confidentiality by not disclosing information about a client or a client's animal that could identify them on social media unless the client gives explicit consent (in certain circumstances, it may be possible to have online discussions about anonymised cases)
- ✓ Comply with any internet or social media policy or procedures set out by your university or employer

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

- × Contravene any internet or social media policy set out by your university (remember that comments or statements made or facilitated by you may reflect on your university and the wider profession as a whole)
- × Cause undue distress or provoke anti-social or violent behaviour
- × Are offensive, false, inaccurate or unjustified (remember that comments which are damaging to an individual's reputation could result in a civil claim for defamation for which you could be personally liable)
- × Abuse, bully, victimise, harass, threaten or intimidate fellow students, colleagues, staff or others
- × Discriminate against an individual based on his or her race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or beliefs, or national origin

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list. There are many different types of social media misuse.

Protecting your privacy

You should consider how to protect your privacy when using social media. It should be remembered that online information can readily be accessed by others and once it is published online, the information can be difficult, if not impossible, to remove. Added to this are the risks that other users may comment on the information, or circulate or copy this to others. For that reason, it is sensible to presume that everything shared online will be there permanently. You should also be mindful that content uploaded on an anonymous basis can, in many cases, be traced back to the original author.

You should read, understand and use appropriate privacy settings in order to maintain control over access to your personal information. It is advisable to review your privacy settings on a regular basis to ensure that the information is not available to unintended users. However, you should remember that this does not guarantee that your information will be kept private and personal information could potentially be viewed by anyone including fellow students, university staff and clients and potential employers.

RCVS Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons

Principles of practice

Veterinary surgeons seek to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to their care and to fulfil their professional responsibilities, by maintaining five principles of practice:

1. **Professional competence**
2. **Honesty and integrity**
3. **Independence and impartiality**
4. **Client confidentiality and trust**
5. **Professional accountability**

Professional responsibilities

Veterinary surgeons have professional responsibilities in the following areas:

1. Veterinary surgeons and animals

1.1	Veterinary surgeons must make animal health and welfare their first consideration when attending to animals.
1.2	Veterinary surgeons must keep within their own area of competence and refer cases responsibly.
1.3	Veterinary surgeons must provide veterinary care that is appropriate and adequate.
1.4	Veterinary surgeons in practice must take steps to provide 24-hour emergency first aid and pain relief to animals according to their skills and the specific situation.
1.5	Veterinary surgeons who prescribe, supply and administer medicines must do so responsibly.
1.6	Veterinary surgeons must communicate with each other to ensure the health and welfare of the animal or group of animals.
1.7	Veterinary surgeons must ensure that clinical governance forms part of their professional activities.

2. Veterinary surgeons and clients

2.1	Veterinary surgeons must be open and honest with clients and respect their needs and requirements.
2.2	Veterinary surgeons must provide independent and impartial advice and inform a client of any conflict of interest.
2.3	Veterinary surgeons must provide appropriate information to clients about the practice, including the costs of services and medicines.
2.4	Veterinary surgeons must communicate effectively with clients and ensure informed consent is obtained before treatments or procedures are carried out.
2.5	Veterinary surgeons must keep clear, accurate and detailed clinical and client records.
2.6	Veterinary surgeons must not disclose information about a client or the client's animals to a third party, unless the client gives permission or animal welfare or the public interest may be compromised.
2.7	Veterinary surgeons must respond promptly, fully and courteously to clients' complaints and criticism.

3. Veterinary surgeons and the profession

3.1 Veterinary surgeons must take reasonable steps to address adverse physical or mental health or performance that could impair fitness to practise; or, that results in harm, or a risk of harm, to animal health or welfare, public health or the public interest.

3.2 Veterinary surgeons who are concerned about a professional colleague's fitness to practise must take steps to ensure that animals are not put at risk and that the interests of the public are protected.

3.3 Veterinary surgeons must maintain and develop the knowledge and skills relevant to their professional practice and competence, and comply with RCVS requirements on the Professional Development Phase (PDP) and continuing professional development (CPD).

3.4 Veterinary surgeons must ensure that all their professional activities are covered by professional indemnity insurance or equivalent arrangements.

3.5 Veterinary surgeons must not hold out themselves, or others, as having expertise they cannot substantiate, or call themselves or others a 'specialist' or similar expression that implies specialist standing unless they have been accredited as specialists, where to do so would be misleading or misrepresentative.

4. Veterinary surgeons and the veterinary team

4.1 Veterinary surgeons must work together and with others in the veterinary team and business, to co-ordinate the care of animals and the delivery of services.

4.2 Veterinary surgeons must ensure that tasks are delegated only to those who have the appropriate competence and registration.

4.3 Veterinary surgeons must maintain minimum practice standards equivalent to the Core Standards of the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme.

4.4 Veterinary surgeons must not impede professional colleagues seeking to comply with legislation and the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct.

5. Veterinary surgeons and the RCVS

5.1 Veterinary surgeons must be appropriately registered with the RCVS.

5.2 Veterinary surgeons must provide the RCVS with their PDP and CPD records when requested to do so.

5.3 Veterinary surgeons, and those applying to be registered as veterinary surgeons, must disclose to the RCVS any caution or conviction, including absolute and conditional discharges and spent convictions, or adverse finding which may affect registration, whether in the UK or overseas (except for minor offences excluded from disclosure by the RCVS).

5.4 Veterinary surgeons, and those applying to be registered as veterinary surgeons, must comply with reasonable requests from the RCVS as part of the regulation of the profession, and comply with any undertakings they give to the RCVS.

6. Veterinary surgeons and the public

6.1 Veterinary surgeons must seek to ensure the protection of public health and animal health and welfare, and must consider the impact of their actions on the environment.

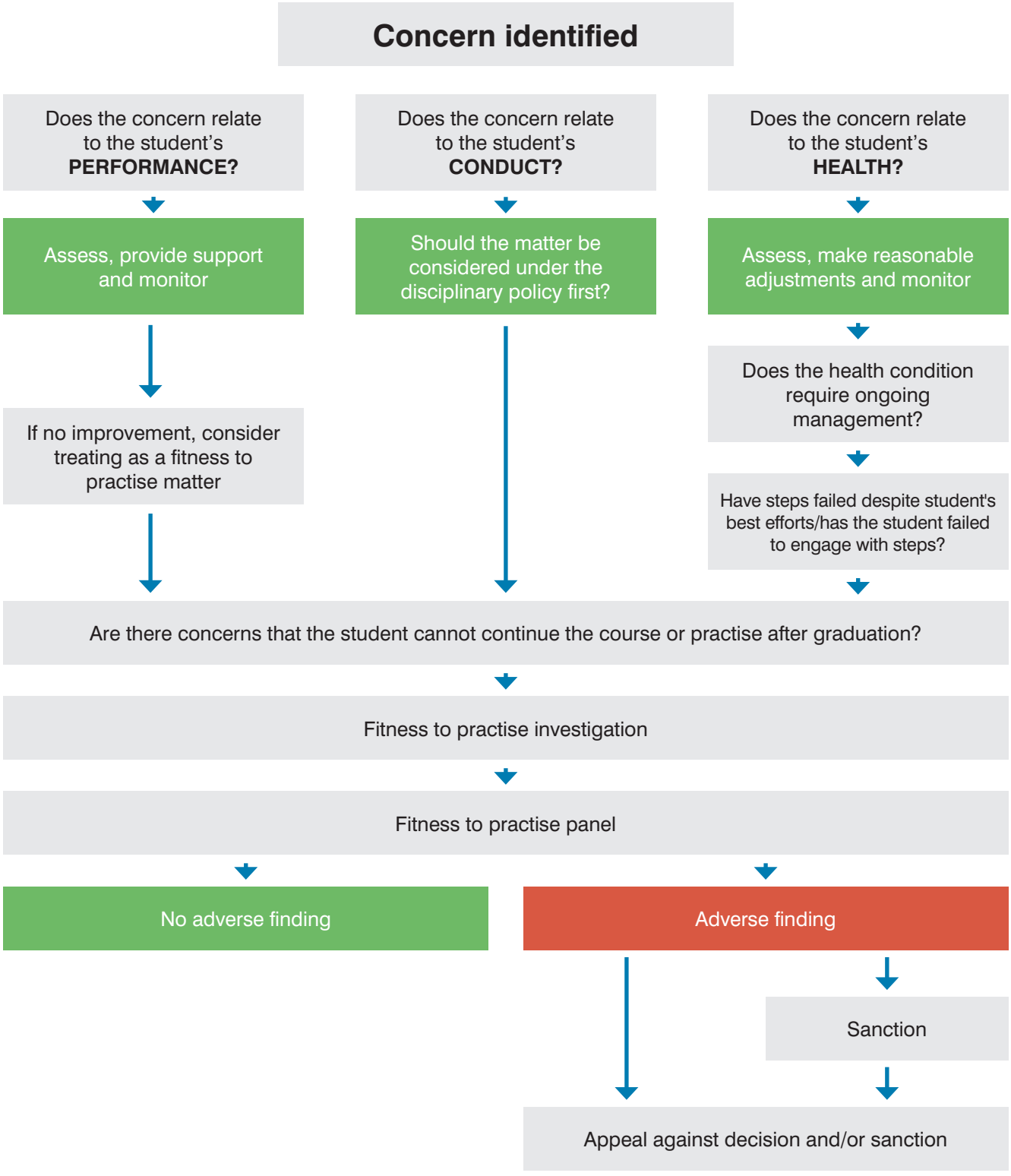
6.2 Veterinary surgeons must certify facts and opinions honestly and with due care, taking into account the 12 Principles of Certification.

6.3 Veterinary surgeons promoting and advertising veterinary products and services must do so in a professional manner.

6.4 Veterinary surgeons must comply with legislation relevant to the provision of veterinary services.

6.5 Veterinary surgeons must not engage in any activity or behaviour that would be likely to bring the profession into disrepute or undermine public confidence in the profession

Managing different types of concern



Finding that may affect registration and which the student must disclose to the RCVS on registration

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