

## **P126 Fitness to Practice Policy and Procedure**

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1. CAFRE is committed to supporting and responding to student needs and to ensuring a positive student experience which provides an enabling environment. Student Veterinary Nurses must undertake their studies to ensure they can practise their profession properly, safely and with respect for the trust and responsibility placed upon them.

### **What is Fitness to Practice?**

“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 demonstrating, in both professional and private life, that one can practise their profession properly, safely and with respect for the trust and responsibility placed upon them” (RCVS, 2016).

2. CAFRE is committed to ensuring that Student Veterinary Nurses (SVNs) will be taught to work within the **RCVS Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses** and will maintain the five Principles to practice:
  - i. Professional competence;
  - ii. Honesty and integrity;
  - iii. Independence and impartiality;
  - iv. Client confidentiality and trust;
  - v. Professional accountability.
3. This Fitness to Practice policy aims to detail how fitness to practise concerns will be addressed. The policy will be used in conjunction with the CAFRE Fitness to Study Policy. The college will respond to and manage situations where a SVN’s fitness to practice is a concern. Where it is determined that a SVN is unfit to practice, his/her participation on his/her programme of study may be suspended or terminated.
4. In responding to and managing situations where a SVN’s fitness to practice is a concern, CAFRE will engage with the SVN’s Training Practice and remain mindful of its duty of care and of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 including its duty to make reasonable adjustments.
5. In implementing this policy CAFRE will consider if one or more of the following is compromised by a student’s behaviour/actions:
  - Protection of animal welfare;
  - Protection of the public;
  - Proper standards of conduct;
  - Compliance with relevant legislation, e.g. animal welfare legislation, equality and discrimination legislation;
  - Public confidence in the profession, as represented by its student members;
  - The reputation of the profession, as represented by its student members.
6. Where the SVN is under the age of 18, or is an adult at risk, their parent/guardian will be notified of any proposed concerns, and invited to accompany the student when interviewed. The Training Practice (employer) will also be included in the process.

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7. When implementing this procedure, the College will work with the SVN and Training Practice concerned in a spirit of support and co-operation and will seek to reach a mutually agreeable outcome wherever possible. Each matter will be dealt with on the basis of its individual circumstances. Any decision reached about an SVN's fitness to practice will be made, wherever possible, through an inclusive process involving the student and other individuals such as CAFRE staff, Training Practice staff, health care professionals and Student Support Services as appropriate in the circumstances.
8. The circumstances that may give rise to concerns regarding a student's fitness to practice will vary. Examples may include (but are not limited to) a deterioration in a student's physical health, marked changes in appearance/demeanour, development of unreasonable, uncooperative or aggressive behaviours or other behaviours which could reflect a deterioration in their mental or physical health, behaviours which endanger the health and safety of themselves, other staff, or impact on the animal welfare of patients.
9. Any member of staff, (CAFRE or Training Practice) to whom a concern about a SVN's fitness to practice is reported, or who themselves has a concern, should in the first instance discuss their concerns with the Veterinary Nursing Programme Manager. In so doing, they must remain mindful of the confidential and sensitive nature of the matters being discussed. Concerns about a student's health or well-being should be acted on promptly. Early intervention and support can minimise the risk of further deterioration in health and well-being.

### **Procedure for dealing with concerns over an individual's fitness to practice**

The process to be followed and the level of the concern are set out in the table below. However depending on the seriousness of the problem or risk posed Level 1 or Level 2 can be bypassed if this is deemed essential from a Health and Safety, Animal Welfare, or personal security perspective. This will be determined by the relevant Head of Branch (HoB).

Where possible at least two working days' notice of any planned meeting will be given. However a HoB can waive this requirement where there are H&S, animal welfare or security concerns.

Where the individual is under 18 or is an adult at risk, their parents/guardians will be informed and invited to attend the meeting. If the learner is over 18 years of age they may be accompanied by an appropriate person if they so request. A Training Practice Staff member, (Practice Principal or Clinical Coach) will also be invited to attend.

An appeal must be lodged within 5 working days of receipt of a written ruling outlining conditions or suspension/expulsion.

The timescale and person to whom an appeal should be made (normally an independent HoB) will be clearly set out in the notification sent to the SVN.

Only the following grounds for appeal will be accepted;

- i) Procedural
- ii) Further evidence is presented
- iii) Unduly harsh decision given the circumstances.

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Stage	Process and purpose	Possible outcomes
<b>Level 1</b> Initial concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student invited to attend an informal and supportive interview.</li> <li>• Information gathered in advance from the programme and Training Practice teams.</li> <li>• Interview conducted by Programme Manager or Student Support Officer (SSO) and Year Manager or personal tutor if appropriate.</li> <li>• Training Practice representative will be invited to the meeting.</li> <li>• Purpose of interview – to have an open conversation to get the SVN's views and agree an action plan if appropriate.</li> <li>• Written summary produced, copied to the SVN and placed in the learner's file.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Request that the SVN engages with support professionals</li> <li>• Increase level of supervision while working in their Training Practice</li> <li>• Request further information (e.g. from their GP).</li> <li>• Put in place reasonable adjustments or additional support as required.</li> <li>• Agree engagement with parents / other organisations.</li> <li>• Agree an action plan and review date.</li> <li>• Refer to the next level for further consideration if concern over progress / likely resolution.</li> </ul> <p>NB Failure to engage with the process including non-attendance when requested without an acceptable reason or non-compliance with the action plan will generally result in referral to Level 2</p>
<b>Level 2</b> Ongoing and/or further concerns;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SVN invited to attend a meeting with the HoB, SSO, Training Practice staff, Programme Manager and any other representatives as deemed appropriate by HoB.</li> <li>• Purpose of the meeting – to share concerns with the SVN and the extent to which their situation can be managed by them and by the college and the Training Practice.</li> <li>• To put in place an action plan to deal with these concerns.</li> <li>• Appeals against conditions or suspensions imposed must be lodged as per guidance set out in the letter of notification within 5 working days of receipt of the notification. .</li> </ul>	<p>As for Level 1 plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommend a compulsory temporary suspension from their programme of study, including working in the Training Practice.</li> <li>• Return from a temporary suspension can be conditional on SVN engaging willingly and cooperatively in the process of discussion and resolution.</li> <li>• More than one meeting can be held at Level 2 at the discretion of the HoB.</li> </ul>

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Stage	Process and purpose	Possible outcomes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CAFRE will consider subject to the nature of the concern if the RCVS will be contact to suspend SRVN registration during any period of investigation. .</li> </ul> <p>Failure to engage with the process including non-attendance without an acceptable reason or no-compliance with the action plan will generally result in referral to Level 3.</p>
<b>Level 3</b> Serious, persistent and/or critical concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A case conference will normally be held with the Head of Service (HoS), HoB, SSO, Practice Principal and other staff who have been involved in the process</li> </ul>	<p>As for Level 2 plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The SVN may be permanently excluded or expelled from the Level 3 course and their employment end by their Training Practice. A decision on whether the SVN can re-enrol on the Level 3 course with or without conditions at some time in the future, will be made at a later stage.</li> <li>CAFRE will advise the RCVS of the requirement to deactivate SRVN registration.</li> </ul>

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### **Return to Practice.**

Following a period of absence for recuperation or treatment, it may be appropriate for the SVN to resume studies. Prior to returning the SVN must produce:

- Evidence that supports a return to practice. This evidence must be from a qualified medical professional (if medical related) who knows the student and is in a position to comment on their ability to resume their studies with no further adverse effects. This is applicable for those students who exited on the basis of a medical need.
- A CAMHS, CPN report or psychiatry letter will only be accepted for those students who were suspended due to poor emotional wellbeing.
- A letter from the Practice Principal that the student is Fit to return to SRVN duties within their Training Practice.

Students must submit this information no later than 2 weeks before their anticipated date of return. A joint decision will be made about the students return and a Return to Practice plan will be implemented. This plan will outline the following:

- Details of any additional practice support that may be required in the short term.
- Details of any therapeutic interventions such as Counselling/CAMHS etc.
- Any longer term reasonable adjustments that may need made.
- A risk assessment and management plan, which takes account of the experiences that led to the initial suspension of studies.

Any return to practice will be subject to the SVN's co-operation and full adherence to the conditions outlined.

### **Reference Documentation:**

<https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/news/new-fitness-to-practise-guidance-for-student-veterinary-nurses/>