

Fitness to Practise Policy for Veterinary Nurse Students

Integrity • Valuing Others • Teamwork • Supportiveness

Our Mission

Raising Aspirations, Unlocking Potential, Advancing Futures

Our Values

Excellence, Passion, Team Work, Integrity, Innovation,
Sustainability, Valuing Others and Supportiveness

Sparsholt College Group

The Sparsholt College Group (the College Group) includes Sparsholt College, Andover College, University Centre Sparsholt, Sparsholt College Services, Westley Enterprises and Andover Town Football Club. College Group policies apply to each part of the group unless specified otherwise.

This latest updated to the *Fitness to Practise Policy for Veterinary Nurse Students* was approved by the Board of Governors in November 2022.

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FITNESS TO PRACTISE POLICY FOR VETERINARY NURSE STUDENTS

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FITNESS TO PRACTISE POLICY FOR VETERINARY NURSE STUDENTS

1. What is Fitness to Practise?

- 1.1 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 lives that they can practise their profession properly, safely and with respect for the trust and responsibility placed upon them.
- 1.2 The concept of fitness to practise applies to students who will enter a profession regulated by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). The RCVS needs to be satisfied that its newly registered nurses can demonstrate good character, competency in the required skills and high standards of welfare to both animals and human clients.
- 1.3 More information on Fitness to Practise can be found on the RCVS website:
<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>

2. Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses

- 2.1 This policy has been prepared using the key principles of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' (RCVS's) Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses. For more information <https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-nurses/>, but the following summarises the code:

Veterinary nurses 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

Additionally, a veterinary nurse would be expected to display the following behaviours:

- Respect
- Maintenance of public trust and confidence
- Personal responsibility
- Professional competence

These Professional responsibilities and behaviours impact the following relationships:

- Veterinary nurses and animals
- Veterinary nurses and clients
- Veterinary nurses and the profession
- Veterinary nurses and the veterinary team
- Veterinary nurses and the RCVS
- Veterinary nurses and the public

3. Fitness to Practise and Veterinary Nursing

- 3.1 University Centre Sparsholt has a responsibility to ensure that VN students are given the opportunity to develop their skills in a supportive environment, and address any fitness to practise concerns. It is not possible to have a complete list of behaviours that may generate concerns over a student's fitness to practise but, generally, the Fitness to Practise Policy would be implemented in the following situations:
- i. Where animal welfare is deemed to be at risk
 - ii. Where the health and safety of yourself, colleagues or the public were deemed to be at risk
 - iii. Where your behaviour (in your education or in your private life) is such that it is deemed likely to bring the profession into disrepute
- 3.2 A serious or repeated concern about a student's ability to practise after graduation, would result in the Fitness to Practise policy being applied.
- 3.3 Academic achievement and practical competence do not guarantee the award of a veterinary nursing qualification that leads to registration with the RCVS. A student must be able to demonstrate fitness to practise in all respects at the point of completion. A student may not be able to complete and qualify as a veterinary nurse until the conclusion of any fitness to practise investigation.
- 3.4 Where there are concerns that a student is not meeting the Fitness to Practise requirements, an investigation will be instigated. Each case will be examined individually, taking into account factors such as:
- The seriousness of the offence and the risk involved to animals, colleagues, the public and yourself.
 - The length of time you have been studying on the course
 - Your clinical experience, competence and the support you have received in practice (where relevant)
 - Any previous concerns relating to the same or similar issues
 - Your understanding of the impact of your actions that have raised the concerns.

3.5 A Fitness to Practise investigation may be as a result of a breach of the Student Code of Conduct or implementation of the Fitness to Study policy or may lead to additional action being taken in accordance with these policies. Further details on Student Code of Conduct and Fitness to Study policy can be found at <https://www.sparsholt.ac.uk/policies-reports/>.

3.6 At all stages the following principles apply and should be central to the student's ability to meet the requirements of fitness to practise:

- Discuss the nature of the concern and how it may be managed by the student and University Centre Sparsholt.
- Seek the student's perception and understanding of the concern and allow the student to respond to the concern(s).
- Seek appropriate input from other relevant members of staff (academic and wellbeing team) and consider any relevant professional documents

4. Fitness to Practise Stage 1

4.1 Concerns raised about a student's fitness to practise – the course tutor will request an informal meeting with the student to discuss the concerns. The meeting will be supportive and aim to facilitate a moderation of the behaviours to enable the student to improve their practise. An action plan will be raised in conjunction with the student as appropriate and a review date will be set to monitor the student's development. Additional support from the Wellbeing team may be put in place.

4.2 Any student who does not engage with the outcome of the meeting will be referred to a Fitness to Practise Stage 2 hearing.

5. Fitness to Practise Stage 2

5.1 Significant concerns raised about a student's fitness to practise or repeated occurrences of the stage 1 concerns – the course tutor will request a formal meeting with the student and chaired by the Assistant Principal – Higher Education.

5.2 The appropriate tutor investigates and presents the evidence relating to fitness to practise at the meeting. Information or evidence from a veterinary practice might be included at this stage. The outcome of the hearing will be confirmed in writing within five working days, with details of the action plan, including any support that is being put in place for the student.

5.3 Any student who does not engage with the outcome of the meeting will be referred to a Fitness to Practise Stage 3 hearing.

5.4 At this point it may be appropriate to notify the RCVS of the outcome of the Stage 2 hearing if the concerns could negatively impact entry onto the Veterinary Nursing Register in future.

6. Fitness to Practise Stage 3

- 6.1 Serious concerns about a student's fitness to practise or repeated occurrences of Stage 2 concerns - the Head of Centre / CL will request a formal hearing with the student and chaired by the Vice Principal/Dean of Higher Education.
- 6.2 Input can be sought from a range of individuals including academic staff, wellbeing staff, academic support staff, veterinary practice staff and the student.
- 6.3 The Stage 3 hearing may consider various options including a robust action plan with frequent reviews, transfer to an alternative programme, other reasonable adjustment needs of the student, a temporary withdrawal or suspension of studies of the student.
- 6.4 The outcome of the Stage 3 hearing will be provided in writing within 5 working days of the hearing.
- 6.5 At this point the RCVS will be notified of the outcome of the Stage 3 hearing as the concerns could negatively impact entry onto the Veterinary Nursing Register in future

7. Appeals

- 7.1 A student shall have the right of appeal against the findings of the Fitness to Practise hearing and/or against the outcome. No other person may appeal.
- 7.2 An appeal is lodged by the submission of a signed and dated statement from the student to the Deputy Principal, which should be headed 'Statement of Appeal'.
- 7.3 A Statement of Appeal must be lodged within ten working days of the date of issue of the Stage 3 outcome.
- 7.4 The Statement of Appeal must be based on one or more of the following grounds:
 - i) a material procedural irregularity in the way in which the Fitness to Practise hearing was conducted, which might have impacted significantly on the validity of the initial concern and the subsequent outcome;
 - ii) new evidence that could not reasonably have been made available to the Fitness to Practise hearing, and can be expected to potentially have led the Fitness to Practise hearing to have made a different decision;
 - iii) that the outcome was perverse when the circumstances of the case and the treatment of other students in similar positions are considered.
- 7.5 The appeal will be considered within 10 working days of receipt, or if additional information is required the student will be notified of the need for an extension to the time required to make a response to the appeal.
- 7.6 A student may withdraw an appeal at any time by giving notice in writing to the Deputy Principal. On receipt of this, a written acknowledgement will be sent to the appellant. Once the appeal has been withdrawn, the appeal shall be deemed to have failed and the matter will be closed.

7.7 In the event that the student does not accept the outcome of the Appeal then the complaints process will be instigated which can include involvement from the University of Portsmouth and ultimately the Office for the Independent Adjudicator. More information can be found in the Complaints and Feedback Policy – Higher Education which can be accessed at <https://www.sparsholt.ac.uk/policies-reports/>