SPARSHOLT COLLEGE GROUP

SPARSHOLT CAMPUS

ANDOVER CAMPUS

UNIVERSITY CENTRE SPARSHOLT

Fitness to Practise Policy for Veterinary Nurse Students

Our Mission

Raising Aspirations, Unlocking Potential, Advancing Futures

Our Values

Excellence, Passion, Teamwork, Integrity, Innovation,

Sustainability, Valuing Others and Supportiveness

Sparsholt College Group

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

The *Fitness to Practise Policy for Veterinary Nurse Students* was approved by the Board of Governors in July 2024 and supersedes previous versions.

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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 fitness-to-practise-a-guide-for-uk-providers-of-veterinary-nursing-education-and-student-veterinary-nurses-web.pdf (sch.local) 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 practise:

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 (UCS) 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 practise (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 Stages: Stage 1

4.1 Concerns raised about a student's fitness to practise – the personal tutor will request an informal meeting with the student to discuss the concerns. The student will be informed in writing that the meeting is informal, the nature of the meeting, the concerns being raised, who will be present and the aim and anticipated outcomes of the meeting. As this is an informal meeting, there will be no appeals process.

4.2 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.

4.3 Any student who does not engage with the outcome of the meeting will be referred to a Fitness to Practise Stage 2 hearing. It is possible that a student can have multiple concerns raise as Stage 1 without proceeding to Stage 2.

5. Fitness to Practise Stages: Stage 2

5.1 Stage 2 is triggered as a result of significant concerns raised about a student's fitness to practise or repeated occurrences of the stage 1 concerns – the course tutor will bring the concerns to the Head of Centre who will agree as to whether the concerns reach the threshold for stage 2. If a stage 2 is triggered, then a request a formal meeting with the student and chaired by the Head of Centre with support from the personal tutor will be arranged as described in section 4.1.

5.2 The individual raising the concerns 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 individual raising the concern is not part of the panel. 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. The student will be reminded (in person and

in writing) that there are 10 working days to appeal the outcome of the panel and they should follow the UCS Appeals Policy which can be found at https://www.sparsholt.ac.uk/policies-reports/.

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 Stages: Stage3

6.1 Serious concerns about a student's fitness to practise or repeated occurrences of Stage 2 concerns should be raised by the Head of Centre who will request a formal hearing with the student and chaired by the Assistant Principal. The personal tutor would ordinarily be present, and the meeting will be arranged as described in section 4.1.

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. Those presenting the case would not be a member of the panel.

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. Upon receipt of the outcome, students will have 10 working days in which to lodge an appeal.

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 Upon receipt on the outcome letter at any stage of the process, there is the opportunity to appeal the outcome and this will follow the UCS Appeals Policy which can be found at https://www.sparsholt.ac.uk/policies-reports/.

7.2 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/.