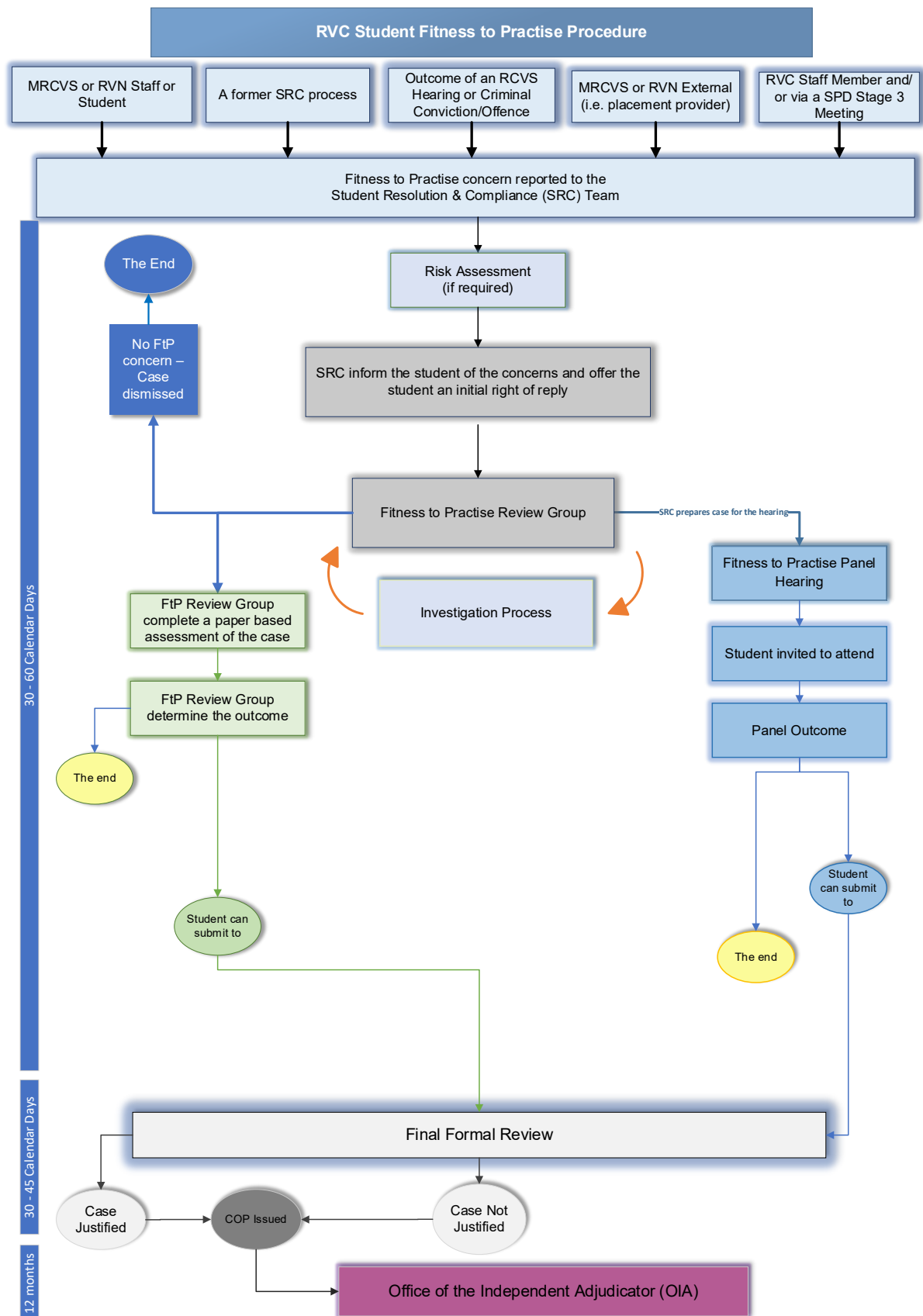


## RVC Student Fitness to Practise Procedure

Version	Update and Reason	Author and Title	Committee Approval	Date of Approval	Effective Date	Review date
1.1	Rewrite	Senior Clinical Tutor and AR for SRC	SPWG Academic Board	July 2025	12 <sup>th</sup> August 2025	July 2028

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Document FTP002 – Workflow



## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Royal Veterinary College (RVC) has a duty to ensure students on a professional course are fit to practise as veterinary nurses and/or veterinary surgeons by the time they complete the programme and gain admission to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS).
- 1.2 The Fitness to Practise (FtP) Procedure is intended to provide a clear, impartial, transparent, and fair process for dealing with professional expectations and standards, within a reasonable timescale and having due regard to the spirit of natural justice.
- 1.3 The RVC is obligated to:
  - support students to achieve fitness to practise, in ensuring that students understand why the professional standards are important and what this means for them.
  - protect present or future patients, clients, staff, students and members of the public.
  - safeguard public confidence in the professions.
  - comply with the requirements of the RCVS and other professional/regulatory bodies; and
  - ensure that students are not awarded a qualification that permits them to practise as a veterinary nurse or veterinary surgeon if they are not fit to do so.

## **2. Scope**

- 2.1 The scope of the FtP Procedure is to take non-punitive action to ensure the safety of our students, staff, patients and visitors and to protect animal welfare and safeguard public confidence in the veterinary profession. The process should be supportive of a student's well-being, equality, diversity, inclusivity and disability needs throughout the procedure.
- 2.2 The procedure applies to any RVC student who is studying to obtain a qualification that is registrable with the RCVS and applies to both veterinary nurses and veterinary surgeons. This also includes BVSc students completing clinical Years 3 – 5 from Aberystwyth University.

2.3 A student who already holds a qualification that is registered with the RCVS may also be considered under these procedures if FtP concerns are related to their enrolled status as a student.

2.4 The procedure does **not** apply to:

- Applicants to the RVC - please visit the [Admissions Policy and Procedure](#) to raise a concern or complaint.
- Clients of our veterinary services<sup>1</sup>. Clients who have concerns about a student's conduct or performance should raise these with the supervising veterinary surgeon or RVN. If these concerns are validated and are sufficiently serious this could result in a student being internally referred to FtP.
- Animal owners or clients who have fitness to practise concerns about a **qualified** veterinary nurse and veterinary surgeon. These concerns should be reported directly to the relevant RVC hospital ([Equine, Queen Mother Animal, Beaumont or Acorn House](#)).
- A RVC staff member; any reports should be directed to the Human Resources [RVC Disciplinary Procedures](#).
- Students that are not on a course of study towards, or already holding, a qualification registrable with the RCVS<sup>2</sup>.
- Students in years 1 & 2 of the BVSc course are not governed by this procedure but by [Aberystwyth University's internal procedures](#).

### 3. Definition of Fitness to Practise

3.1 Fitness to practice is the ability to meet professional standards; it is about character, professional competence and health. According to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), someone is fit to practise if they have "the skills, knowledge, character and health to practise their profession safely and effectively"<sup>3</sup>.

3.2 Fitness to practise also encompasses professional behaviours and conduct outside of the study environment which could affect the protection of the public or undermine the public confidence in the professions and the RVC.

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<sup>1</sup> The links below should be used to raise a concern or complaint about the conduct of a student or qualified veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse: <https://www.rvc.ac.uk/equine-vet/information-and-advice/raising-a-concern> <https://www.rvc.ac.uk/small-animal-vet/general-practice/about-us/privacy-statement>

<sup>2</sup> For non-RCVS registered courses, the expectation of professional standards is set by the [RVC Charter](#).

<sup>3</sup> [Health & Care Professions Council fitness to practise](#)

#### 4. Fitness to Practise Roles and Responsibilities

Named role	Description of responsibility
Referred student(s)	The student being referred to the Fitness to Practise Procedure.
Referring person and/or the person referring	The referring person ( <i>“the MRCVS or RVN registered student, staff member, external MRCVS or RVN practitioner or practice provider”</i> ) who refers a case to the RVC FtP Procedures.
Student Resolution and Compliance (SRC) Team	The team that manages and administers the FtP casework and process including providing procedural support and advice for all staff and students.
Fitness to Practise (FtP) Review Group	A group that is responsible for reviewing, considering, and providing an outcome during an FtP Panel hearing.
Fitness to Practise (FtP) Panel	A group that is responsible for reviewing, considering, and providing an outcome during an FtP Panel hearing.
Chair	The nominated person who leads and manages the FtP Review Group or Panel hearing and has the casting vote on any outcomes made. The Chair will be responsible for approving Panel reports and/or outcomes.
Presenter	The person responsible for presenting a case to an FtP Review Group or Panel. Ordinarily, this is the decision maker (or their nominee) from the previous process e.g. the Investigating Officer.
Supporter	A person supporting a referred student during any meeting and/or hearing facilitated under the FtP Procedure.  The supporter cannot participate in any discussions unless invited by the Chair or Investigating Officer.
Legal Representation	To provide their professional counsel to the student or the Panel. Any legal representation will only be able to address matters raised by another legal party. The Panel will not be permitted to respond to any legal discussion or comments.
Investigating Officer (IO)	The person appointed to investigate the facts of a case.  Where deemed appropriate, a member of the SRC Team

	can act as an IO.
Notetaker	The person(s) responsible for taking a non-verbatim record of discussion at an investigatory meeting or FtP Review Group and/or Panel hearing.

## 5. Issues that may lead to fitness to practise concerns

- Serious concerns about a student's health which means they might not be fit to practise and/or be able to reach the required professional standards of a veterinary surgeon or a veterinary nurse.
- Concerns about student academic conduct or behaviour will ordinarily be investigated under those procedures before any referral to FtP Procedures.
- Decisions to suspend clinical or academic study will be taken as part of the Risk Assessment at the point a case is referred under the FtP Procedures
- Allegations or charges of criminal offences, convictions, cautions or reprimands.

5.1 A non-exhaustive list of examples which may lead to a fitness to practise concern can be found in section 33.

5.2 Some concerns may arise from a pattern of behaviour, rather than one single incident. Students should be aware that behaviours that impact a student's safety off campus and out of study hours may also have an impact on their fitness to practise.

## 6. How to refer a case of Fitness to Practise

6.1 An MRCVS or RVN registered student, staff member, external MRCVS or RVN practitioner or provider can refer a student under these procedures if they are concerned about a student's professional conduct, behaviour or health while the student is enrolled on a programme leading to registration with the RCVS or already hold a professional qualification.

6.2 The person making a referral of fitness to practise concerns should fill in an [RVC Student Fitness to Practise Referral Form](#) outlining the circumstances of the concern; along with any supporting evidence and submit the completed submission to

[fitnesstopractise@rvc.ac.uk](mailto:fitnesstopractise@rvc.ac.uk) within 3 months of the issue(s) first being brought to the reporter's attention.

- 6.3 The SRC Team will acknowledge the submitted referral within five calendar days.
- 6.4 Should a referral be received without the necessary details to initiate a thorough review, the person referring the case will be contacted and asked to submit further information within a specified timescale. Non-engagement by the referring person (within the specified deadline) may result in the case being withdrawn. Procedural timescales will not start until the submission is received in full.
- 6.5 The person referring the student should make sure that the issue(s) are clearly outlined with dates, locations, and details, along with evidence (where possible) and an explanation of the impact or risk of harm the concern or incident has had on the referred student, fellow students, staff members, client or patient.
- 6.6 Where the referral is related to fitness to practise concerns for a group of students, the concern should be provided on one form ensuring all the referred students are named.
- 6.7 Students who are not MRCVS or RVN registered cannot refer a student to the FtP Procedure. Instead, they should raise their concerns with an appropriate RVC staff member (e.g. Rotation Year Leader, Senior Tutor, Academic Tutor). The staff member will then determine whether a referral to the FtP Procedure is required.

## **7. Professional judgement**

- 7.1 The question of whether a student is fit to practise as a veterinary nurse and/or veterinary surgeon can only be answered by an individual or a Panel of specialists with expertise and knowledge of the profession. That conclusion would amount to professional judgement.
- 7.2 Any Panel member exercising professional judgement will be appointed to the role based on their specialist expertise in the case being heard.
- 7.3 Professional judgement must be based on substantiated evidence i.e. using credible records and witness accounts.



- 7.4 Professional judgement will not be required if a decision around fitness to practise is being made based on an RCVS outcome, a criminal conviction or a custodial sentence.

## **8. General principles**

- 8.1 The RVC operates a civil standard of proof. This means that the level of proof required will be based on the 'balance of probability' that something is more likely than less likely to have happened.
- 8.2 The RVC will not act on referrals of fitness to practice that cannot be reasonably evidenced at the point of referral.
- 8.3 Mitigating and aggravating factors will be considered in response to any action taken under the FtP Procedure. Examples of this will be consideration for learning and professional development as a student progresses through the course. For those referred and who are already registered, the expectation of professional behaviours will be far greater.
- 8.4 This procedure will be conducted in accordance with the process timescales. There may be cases where, for good reason (such as in the matter of fairness), the RVC may adjust the timescales of any fitness to practise proceedings; for example, to meet any [reasonable adjustments](#) under the [Equality Act 2010](#). Any changes to the timescale will be communicated to all parties.
- 8.5 Where fitness to practise concerns are raised against more than one student, the students will present their case(s) individually. The FtP Review Group or Panel will be charged with considering all cases arising from a similar event, incident or circumstance to ensure there is an equitable consideration of the actions and outcomes in response to the concerns raised.
- 8.6 Outcomes derived from group FtP referrals (one or more students) should be determined on an individualised basis.

- 8.7 If the FtP Procedure exceeds the point of the referred student's completion of the programme, then the student's graduation may need to be deferred, irrespective of the student meeting the Assessment and Award Regulations.
- 8.8 If an MRCVS registered student withdraws from their programme of study before the FtP Procedure have concluded, the RVC will complete procedures in the student's absence and take the necessary steps to inform the RCVS if fitness to practise concerns are considered justified.
- 8.9 Should a non-registered student withdraw from registration at the RVC this would mark the end of the FtP Procedures.
- 8.10 All communication in relation to fitness to practise cases will be conducted through the referred student's RVC email account.
- 8.11 Conflicts of interest checks are conducted by the SRC Team for all named parties to ensure matters of fitness to practise are considered independently without any real or reasonably perceived bias.

## **9. Precautionary measures**

- 9.1 Precautionary measures are non-punitive steps taken without any presumption of guilt or adverse finding, to protect the RVC, its staff, students, clients, visitors and the members of the public.
- 9.2 Precautionary measures are determined by convening a case management risk assessment meeting chaired by the Director of Learning and Wellbeing (or nominee) and attended by the Registrar (or nominee), Head of the Advice Centre, clinical representative from the student's area of study (if required) and any other identified staff members with the necessary expertise.
- 9.3 The purpose is to review the concerns surrounding the case, to identify and agree on precautionary measures that the RVC will take to mitigate any risks to those affected by the concerns arising from the fitness to practise referral.
- 9.4 Some examples of precautionary measures include (but are not limited to):

- 9.4.1 Considering measures to prevent interactions between students, witnesses

or those directly affected by the case.

- 9.4.2 Imposing conditions to prevent communications between students, witnesses or those directly affected by the case.
  - 9.4.3 Suspending the referred student from their studies (such a step will only be taken where the risk level is high and where there are no alternative measures that could be put in place to mitigate that risk). Any suspension should be for a specified period and subject to review at regular intervals. The suspension does not imply any presumption of guilt.
  - 9.4.4 Excluding the referred student from identified activities (for example, attending a placement or participating in clinical activities).
  - 9.4.5 Implementing alternative teaching arrangements for a temporary period until the investigation has been completed and a decision on possible action taken.
- 9.5 The precautionary measure can remain in place until a decision has been determined under the FtP Procedures.
- 9.6 Precautionary measures introduced under a previous procedure (e.g. the Misconduct Procedure) will remain in place throughout a student's subsequent referral to the FtP Procedure, provided that a review of the measures confirms that they remain reasonable and proportionate.
- 9.7 The SRC Team will write to the referred student(s) and/or any named RVC student who may be directly affected by the concerns raised within 5 calendar days of the risk assessment being completed. The letter will set out the precautionary measures that must be complied with. Students are expected to comply with the precautionary measures set out and failure to do so may in itself become part of the Fitness to Practise concerns raised.

## 10. Process and timescales

### 10.1 Process timescales table:

Process	Action	Expected Timescale
Fitness to Practise Procedure	FtP Review Group resulting in a paper base review and outcome	14 calendar days
	Fitness to Practise panel (including any investigative work, if required)	46 calendar days in total

Review	Final Formal Review (internal to RVC)	30 - 45 calendar days
External Review (Independent external review)	Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)	12 calendar months

10.2 The RVC will make every effort to adhere to the timescales above but matters of complexity and/or periods of RVC closure or staff absence may require additional time to ensure that matters of fitness to practise are considered thoroughly. Where these timescales need to be extended, we will confirm this in writing to the student(s) and keep them regularly informed of progress.

10.3 Students should engage in the process by adhering to deadlines set for submission of material and attending scheduled meetings. Where deadlines cannot be met, students should notify the SRC Team at the earliest opportunity, providing their reason(s) for any delay and an anticipated completion date.

## **11. Support and advice for students**

11.1 Students who are responding to fitness to practise concerns may access support from the Advice Centre ([advice@rvc.ac.uk](mailto:advice@rvc.ac.uk)). The Advice Centre can assist with co-ordinating any necessary academic adjustments, housing, finance, health, and well-being issues and, where appropriate, assist students to access specialist support services provided by external agencies.

11.2 Students can seek support and advice from a range of staff members. Examples are (but not restricted to) listed below:

- Academic Tutor
- Senior Tutor
- Supervisor
- Departmental Postgraduate Research (PGR) Advisor
- [Research Degrees Officer](#)
- [Student Union Representative](#)
- Course Director or Academic Head of the Graduate School
- Year Leader
- [Advice Centre](#)
- [Disability Advisor](#)
- [RVC Report and Support](#)
- [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Unit](#)
- [Student Resolution and Compliance \(SRC\) Team](#)

11.3 Students are entitled to bring a supporter to any meeting within the procedure.

This person can be:

- an RVC staff member.
- a friend.
- a relative, or
- a representative of the Students' Union or its staff.

The person cannot:

- speak on behalf of the referred student or participate in the hearing unless invited to do so by the Chair of the FtP Panel.
- be related to an investigation relevant to the student's referral to the FtP Procedure (e.g. a witness)

## **12. Confidentiality and record-keeping**

12.1 Individuals providing statements for the case will be requested to maintain confidentiality and ensure that the case is not discussed amongst the RVC or the wider community.

12.2 Confidentiality cannot be maintained under these procedures if a disclosure leads to a safeguarding concern or risk to life; in this event, the SRC Team would be obligated to

inform the Advice Centre to determine whether there is a requirement to escalate the matter to external authorities.

- 12.3 Breaches of confidentiality (e.g. breaches of any precautionary measures) may result in further action being taken under the FtP Procedures.
- 12.4 The Academic Board will receive annual reports of anonymised FtP case data i.e. total number of referred cases, their categories and outcomes. The RVC will annually consider the FtP cases along with other forms of feedback, to improve the quality and effectiveness of the RVC's governance, compliance, and service delivery standards.
- 12.5 Students are advised to keep a copy of all correspondence in case they are dissatisfied with the action(s) taken under the FtP Procedures and wish to use this information as part of their supporting evidence when making a request for a Final Formal Review or submitting a complaint to the Office of Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE).
- 12.6 FtP records are administered centrally by the SRC Team within the Academic Registry. Records of FtP cases are retained for 6 years following the last recorded action on the case to enable the RVC to respond to any requests regarding the decision and processes that may be made by the OIA and/or Freedom of Information (FOI) requests.
- 12.7 To help support the RVC annual evaluation, any student involved in an FtP process will be invited to complete a [Student Resolution and Compliance Survey](#).

### **13. Retention, Deletion and Archiving**

- 13.1 Data relating to Fitness to Practise cases is used to:

- Monitor and analyse the management of casework within the required timeframe to improve and develop RVC service delivery.
- Respond to internal audit requirements.
- Enable the RVC to respond to any requests regarding the decision and process that may be made by the OIA.
- Conduct the periodic evaluation of cases in relation to FOI Requests.
- RCVS, EAEVE, AVMA accreditation and/or inspections.

13.2 Any Panel members who obtain copies of records before and during the FtP Review Group and/or Panel hearing will be sent an automated reminder to delete and/or shred any papers and/or documented evidence related to the case being heard.

13.3 This will include double deleting any copies saved in download folders. Access will also be removed from the created OneDrive folder where case documents are securely stored.

#### **14. Attendance and engagement**

14.1 Failure to engage with the fitness to practise process may result in additional action being taken under this procedure.

14.2 Approval of non-attendance is only permitted in exceptional circumstances (e.g. medical grounds). If approval is granted, the hearing will be postponed with the intention of rescheduling at the earliest opportunity.

14.3 If a student is unable to attend any meeting or hearing under this procedure, or fails to engage with the procedure, the SRC Team or Chair of the FtP Panel may agree that the case be considered in the student's absence on the basis of the evidence available at the time of the meeting or hearing.

14.4 If a case is considered without the student in attendance the referred student will be offered an opportunity to submit a written statement.

14.5 For cases where a student is unable to attend based on medical or mental health grounds, the FtP procedures will be suspended until the case can continue.

- 14.6 In such cases where the student has concerns over their mental health or impaired decision making then a validation (e.g. an Occupational Health report or private clinical report) of being fit to undertake the process will be requested.

## **15. Reasonable adjustments**

- 15.1 The RVC encourages referred students to disclose, at the earliest opportunity, any disabilities, learning differences or personal circumstances that may require reasonable adjustments to FtP processes so that the RVC has sufficient time to consider these requests and implement any agreed adjustments. Requests can be submitted in writing to [fitnesstopractise@rvc.ac.uk](mailto:fitnesstopractise@rvc.ac.uk).
- 15.2 A reasonable adjustment may include providing information in different formats, providing additional breaks during meetings, or conducting meetings via videoconferencing (for example where referred students are working/carers and unable to travel).
- 15.3 At the RVC's discretion, by way of making reasonable adjustments, the student may also be entitled to bring a health professional, support worker or disability advisor.

## **16. Fitness to Practise concerns relating to RVC and RCVS Procedures**

### **16.1 Misconduct Procedure**

- 16.1.1 Students on all courses whose actions or behaviours represent a potential breach of the RVC Charter will ordinarily be investigated under the Student Misconduct Procedure. Where appropriate (i.e. for veterinary and nursing students) they may subsequently be referred to the FtP Procedure to review the professional implications of any adverse findings.
- 16.1.2 Referral to FtP will only occur once the misconduct process is complete. If necessary, precautionary measures (refer to section 9) may be put in place during the Misconduct Process; this might include preventing the student from engaging in clinical placements or studies temporarily.



16.1.3 The decision to refer a student to FtP will be made by the chair of the misconduct panel (or the decision maker, if the process is not referred to a panel hearing).

## **16.2 Academic Misconduct Procedure**

16.2.1 Where the outcome of the Academic Misconduct Procedure confirms that a student registered on a professional programme has shown an intent to deceive or a significant failure of due care in research or clinical practice, the Decision Maker assigned under the Academic Misconduct Procedure will determine whether there is a requirement to refer the case to the FtP.

16.2.2 Any investigation and/or hearing under the Academic Misconduct Procedure will be completed before the case is referred to FtP.

## **16.3 Proven Breaches RCVS Professional Code of Conduct**

16.3.1 Proven breaches of the behaviours outlined in the RCVS Fitness to Practise Guidance for UK Veterinary Schools, Veterinary Students and UK providers of Veterinary Nursing Education and Student Veterinary Nurses are likely to be automatically referred to the Fitness to Practice Review Group. The following would be considered as a proven breach:

- Proven criminal offences (i.e. where a student is convicted of, cautioned for, reprimanded or charged with any criminal offences).
- Behaviours that have been proven at the conclusion of a RCVS Disciplinary Committee Hearing

## **17. Health and Disability issues**

17.1 Where concerns of fitness to practise are relevant to a diagnosed or suspected illness or disability, the FtP Procedure will normally only be applied if reasonable adjustments, medical and other therapeutic interventions including periods of interruption to study have been exhausted.

17.2 The FtP Review Group or Panel can request medical clearance (e.g. an Occupational

Health report or other medical reports) to ensure the student is mentally and physically able to engage in the process and represent themselves coherently.

## **18. RCVS Considerations**

18.1 The RVC may request guidance around reasonable adjustments and competency of Day One skills to the RCVS where appropriate.

18.2 Veterinary students are required to report any justified Fitness to Practise concerns to the RCVS at the time of registration.

18.3 Veterinary nursing students who are already registered with the RCVS from the time of enrolment will be required to report any justified Fitness to Practise concerns once the FtP process is completed.

18.4 A student that already holds an RCVS-registered qualification prior to joining the RVC as a student, is accountable for disclosing any adverse finding relating to fitness to practise to the RVC at the first available opportunity. For example, this adverse finding could come from the RCVS, previous employment or study, or through the criminal justice system.

18.5 Should a student be removed from the RCVS register, the RVC will consider whether they should be permitted to join or continue to study at the RVC towards a non-professional qualification (e.g. BSc, Masters or PhD). The decision will be weighed on the following criteria:

18.5.1 Whether the RVC student was accepted on the programme due to their RCVS registered status.

18.5.2 The seriousness of the justified actions.

18.5.3 Whether the RCVS conclusion was following a criminal conviction, reprimand, or custodial sentence.

## **19 Reconsidering the same offence**

19.1 The RVC will consider the below factors to determine whether or not it is

proportionate to reconsider the same offence:

19.1.1 The length of time that has elapsed and the effect of this on the reliability of any evidence to be considered.

19.1.2 Whether the previous offence is of a similar severity or nature.

19.1.3 An evaluation of the supportive steps taken by the RVC and the referred student to mitigate any previous issues or improve their progression or performance.

19.1.4 If the previous issues demonstrate a reoccurring pattern of behaviour which, despite any adjustments, is either continuing or escalating in its severity.

## **20 Legal representation**

20.1 Where the concerns are sufficiently serious that the student might be permanently excluded from the course, legal representation is permitted.

20.2 If the student wishes to appoint legal representation, then the SRC representative must be notified at least 10 working days in advance of the FtP panel hearing.

20.3 The legal representative must abide by the conditions stipulated in section 11.3 and any undue interference in the process may lead to the Chair requesting them to leave the hearing.

20.4 The referred student should expect that the RVC will also appoint legal representation in such circumstances. This may result in the panel hearing being postponed.

20.5 The RVC will not bring legal representation to a panel hearing when the student is unrepresented, or without notifying the student ahead of the proceedings, but may seek legal guidance before (or exceptionally after) the panel hearing.

20.6 Legal representation will usually not be present during panel deliberations about the appropriate outcome of the FtP hearing, as this is not a legal judgement but a collective professional opinion.

## 21. Composition of the Fitness to Practise Review Group

21. The SRC Team will appoint the FtP Review Group, and members will be required to serve as a Panel member for a fixed term of 12 months (minimum).

21.1 The FtP Review Group pool will comprise of:

- 10 MRCVS academics; all able to take the role of Chair
- 4 RVN academics; all able to take the role of Chair
- 1 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion representative or ambassador, or a Student Representative, as appropriate to the case.
- 1 representative experienced in SRC procedures, this can be an academic or professional services staff member; their role is to ensure procedural fairness and consistency. This member has no vote on the outcome of the case. This representative will only be required if the RVNs/MRCVS panellists have not previously served in this role.
- Notetaker appointed by the SRC Team (non-voting).

21.2 The quorum required for the FtP Review Group to convene will be no less than **two voting** members. The appointed Chair shall have a casting vote.

21.3 The SRC Team will appoint members from the membership pool depending on the nature of the case and the expertise needed.

21.4 At least two members of the selected FtP Review Group Panel must be an MRCVS or RVN representative to ensure there is a reasonable level of professional judgment representation.

21.5 Where it is deemed necessary and is case specific, the entire membership of a FtP Review Panel can comprise of MRCVS or RVN members and/or a hybrid of both.

21.6 The FtP Review Group may be required to review multiple cases in one session.

21.7 There may be grounds to appoint additional members to the FtP Review Group according to the nature and complexity of the case and/or to extend the FtP Review Group's responsibility to a Panel where it is deemed appropriate.

21.8 If the FtP Review Group is extended to a Panel consideration there must be no cause for concern over a conflict of interest or a perception of bias. Where this happens SRC may adjourn for no longer than 7 calendar days to account for procedural checks before the dissemination of case information to the new members.

21.9 The SRC Team are responsible for changing the FtP Review Group's membership based on staff absences and resignations.

21.10 The SRC Team will determine whether the FtP Review Group meet in person or via Teams depending on procedural timescales and membership availability.

## **22 Fitness to Practise Review Group**

22.1 The remit of the FtP Review Group is to independently assess the referred case and triage it to the appropriate process based on the submitted report and evidence.

22.2 The FtP Review Group and the referred student will be provided with identical copies of the case evidence 7 calendar days before the FtP Review Group meeting date using an appropriate shared drive or folder.

22.3 The case evidence will consist of:

- A copy of the referring party's FtP Referral Form.
- A copy of the supportive documentation.
- If the case has already been proven, the FtP Review Group will receive a full copy of the previous investigation and outcome.
- If the case relates to a previous offence of a similar nature the FtP Review Group will be provided with a summary of the previous case.

22.4 Additional submissions of case evidence by SRC or the referred student can only be accepted and approved by the Chair. If approved, the referred student will also receive an identical copy of the completed evidence pack.

22.5 The FtP Review Group must decide on one of the following actions for each presented case:

- There is no FtP concern (case is dismissed).
- Case can be addressed via a paper-based review and outcome; associated outcomes should align with the Fitness to Practise Types, Examples and Actions Table (refer to section 33)
- Case requires escalation to a FtP Panel hearing.
- The case needs to be investigated further (refer to section 24) before deciding on one of the 3 actions above.

22.6 In cases where the outcome is not unanimous, the FtP Review Group Chair will have the casting vote.

## **23 Criteria for deciding the format of the FtP Case**

23.1 To determine whether to facilitate a paper-based review, the FtP Review Group should decide if the case meets one or more of the following:

- The case has substantiated documentation and leaves no further gaps of enquiry and so it is reasonable to reach a conclusion based on the information provided without the referred student attending.
- Presence at a review panel is likely to cause an adverse impact on the referred student's mental well-being, studies, or personal circumstances.
- Consideration of the length of procedural timescales thus far, specifically whether a paper-based review could minimise or avoid any further stress or inconvenience to the referred student.

23.2 The FtP Review Group may decide that a panel hearing is more appropriate if the case meets one or more of the criteria below:

- The seriousness of the case is likely to have potentially serious consequences for the student i.e. it may prevent the student from continuing study or progressing to their intended career.
- Case highlights gaps of detail or information and requires further lines of questioning by the FtP Panel to the referred student within an in-person or remote setting.
- There is an identified reasonable adjustment to hold the hearing in person or

remotely.

- The referred concern(s) are considered to have a long-lasting risk or impact on the referred student or others which the RVC are obligated to protect (refer to 1.3)
- There is a potential breach of professionalism, behaviours or conduct which is likely to hinder the referred student's ability to continue on the programme.
- There is evidence to suggest that the referred student has shown dishonesty and a lack of insight during an investigation process.

23.3 Should the FtP Review Group opt to proceed with an FtP Panel hearing, the FtP Panel and the referred student will be provided with 7 calendar days' notice of the hearing date, time and venue. The referred student will be informed of the FtP Panel's rationale for progressing to a hearing.

23.4 If the FtP Review Group opts to refer the case to a FtP Panel, the SRC Team will proceed with arranging a Panel (refer to section 25) and will notify the referred student.

23.5 Should the FtP Review Group opt to proceed with a paper-based review, the SRC Team will provide the formal FtP Review Group Outcome letter to the referred student within 7 calendar days along with the reason(s) why the paper-based review was appropriate under the criteria aforementioned in section (23.1).

## **24 Fitness to Practise Investigation**

24.1 Where the FtP Review Group determines further investigation is required, a member of the SRC team (or their nominee not directly involved in the details of the case) will be appointed as an Investigating Officer (IO).

24.2 The role of IO is to gather relevant information regarding the concerns being considered. This can include meeting with the person referring the case to fully understand the nature and details of the concerns being raised and meeting with any relevant witnesses, allowing them a fair opportunity to respond.

24.3 The IO may ask the referring person and/or referred student to provide additional information and/or evidence to support their claims.

- 24.4 The IO may also be required to interview any identified witnesses who can provide information regarding the incident and/ or matter to help ascertain the facts of the case. Any identified witnesses will be contacted by the SRC Team to obtain consent to participate in the investigation process before the IO makes direct contact.
- 24.5 Any student requested to attend an investigation interview may bring a supporter. As this is a fact-finding exercise, the supporter cannot be a legal representative.
- 24.6 The supporter may not contribute to the meeting unless asked to do so by the IO - please refer to section 11.3 for more information on the role of the supporter.
- 24.7 A note taker will be present to take a written account of the investigation interview. The meeting will be recorded for accuracy. The recording will be deleted once both the IO and interviewee approve the notes as a non-verbatim record of interview.
- 24.8 All parties interviewed will be required to complete a Record of Interview Form which may be used in further RVC proceedings.
- 24.9 The IO may also speak with staff and/or internal teams with relevant expertise to gain general information and insight that may help them better understand the case. It is the responsibility of the IO to ensure that they have received all information and statements required to conclude the investigation process.
- 24.10 The IO will present their findings and recommendations to the FtP Review Group who will consider the report and any evidence. The FtP Review Group, after taking any required advice, will be able to decide whether:
- 24.10.1 To dismiss the case on grounds of a lack of credible evidence. The FtP Review Group should consider if the student has been financially disadvantaged in any way due to the initiation of the proceedings i.e.reimbursement of the cost of travel expenses.
- 24.10.2 Case can be addressed via a paper-based review and outcome; associated outcomes should align with the Fitness to Practise Types, Examples and



## Actions Table (refer to section 31)

- 24.10.3 To refer the case to FtP Panel, the reasons(s) for doing so should align with the criteria under section 23.2.
- 24.11 The SRC Team will review the draft report to ensure fair process has been applied and the action imposed is in accordance with the FtP Procedure. Any deliberations may involve the Registrar or Deputy Registrar. The IO and/or FtP Review Group may be requested to provide further information or conduct an additional investigation if any gaps of enquiry are identified.
- 24.12 If the outcome is aligned with a decision made under section 24.10, then the SRC Team will write to the referred student confirming the outcome, including a copy of the investigation report and any supporting evidence to support the final decision.
- 24.13 Details of a right of review will also be provided to the referred student in the event they have grounds to initiate a Final Formal Review.
- 24.14 Any feedback or recommendations identified following the investigation process will be tracked and disseminated to the appropriate teams by the SRC Team.
- 24.15 For any determined outcome, sufficient rationale to support the outcome needs to be provided. This should be clearly outlined as to how and why the decision by the FtP Review Group and/or the Panel was determined.

## 25 Fitness to Practise Panel

25.1 The FtP Panel will be convened by the SRC Team. The Panel will consist of:

- One Chair
- Two members of academic staff
- One member of the Panel may be external to the RVC
- One member of the Panel may be specifically required for their expertise in a specialist field (MVetMed, Intern, PGR or PhD-related cases).
- Notetaker from the SRC Team

- 25.2 At least 2 members must hold the professional qualification (RVN/MRCVS) that the student holds or is working towards.
- 25.3 The quorum must be 4 voting members.
- 25.4 The SRC Team will formally invite the Presenter (role defined under section 4) who is bringing the case to the FtP Panel and the referred student (role defined under section 4) giving both parties at least 7 calendar days' notice of the case being heard by the Panel.
- 25.5 The formal invitation letter will outline the necessary information to attend (date, time and location of the Hearing), including the concerns being judged against the referred student and possible breaches of professional behaviours.
- 25.6 Both parties will be required to attend and present their case to the FtP Panel Members.
- 25.7 The Presenter and the referred student will be given an opportunity to a) declare any named witnesses and b) submit any documentation in support of their case being heard.
- 25.8 The term 'witness' includes any person who can offer an informed or factual opinion on the case being heard.
- 25.9 A named witness can be an internal or external person to the RVC. Named witnesses cannot be a legal representative.
- 25.10 All named witnesses will be contacted by the SRC Team via email and asked for their consent to participate in the hearing. Witnesses who opt not to participate will be declared to the Panel by the note-taker.
- 25.11 It is at the discretion of the Chair whether witness participation is provided in the form of a written statement, in person or by video conference. RVC staff members who are called as named witnesses are obligated to attend unless a valid reason for non-attendance is provided.

- 25.12 The Presenter will leave the FtP Panel hearing once their case has been heard and the Panel's line of questioning is complete.
- 25.13 The purpose of the referred student's attendance will be to present their case and version of events and answer any line of questioning. The referred student will not be allowed to question the witnesses.
- 25.14 The referred student will remain in the hearing for the duration of the hearing. Student non-attendance will be considered in conjunction with 'Attendance and Engagement', details outlined in section (14).
- 25.15 The referred student must declare their supporter to the SRC Team at least 5 calendar days before the hearing.
- 25.16 Panel members may require a written statement from the referred student. If required, the referred student should outline how the incident has directly impacted their learning experience and personal circumstance(s).
- 25.17 The Panel members and the referred student will receive a copy of the following paperwork within (where applicable) at least 5 calendar days before the date of the hearing:
- A copy of the FtP Referral Form and any accompanying evidence.
  - Full disclosure of the investigation process (if taken place).
  - Any internal evidence or case findings which have come to light and are directly relevant to the case.
  - The Presenter's case documentation (if submitted).
  - The referred student's case documentation (if submitted).
  - The referred student's impact statement (if required).
- 25.18 The FtP Panel hearings will be recorded by the SRC notetaker.

## 26 Fitness to Practise Outcomes

- 26.1 The FtP Panel will decide the outcome based on the balance of probability (whether something is more likely than not to have occurred) taking appropriate care to follow the OIA's principles of natural justice:

*“Decision makers must come to matters without bias or a reasonable perception of bias; each party must have a fair hearing; the process must be completed without delay; and decision makers must make reasonable decisions and give reasons for those decisions.”*

- 26.2 Post meeting deliberation will be limited to the FtP Panel and SRC notetaker only. Notes will be taken but Panel discussion will not be recorded.

- 26.3 In cases where the outcome is unanimous, the Panel Chair will have the casting vote.

- 26.4 The main consideration under Panel discussion will be to:

- Review, consider and determine the concerns made against the referred student in turn and determine whether each is justified, not justified, or partially justified.
- Determine the seriousness of the proven concern(s).
- Apply action with consideration to any relevant aggravating and mitigating factors.
- Consideration of referral to other procedures i.e., SPD process.
- If no concerns are justified the FtP Procedures stop at this point.
- The Panel will need to align any non-punitive actions taken to the Fitness to Practise Types, Examples and Actions Table (refer to section 31).

- 26.5 The Panel may impose one or more non-punitive actions, taking into account the specific concerns, the particular features of the case, the relevant mitigation brought forward and in certain cases any impact statement provided by the referred student.

## 27 Communication of outcome

- 27.1 Written communication before and after the FtP Review Group and/or Panel hearing will be made through the referred student's RVC email address. If they are not

registered on a programme, referred students can expect to continue to have access to their RVC email accounts for the duration of the procedure.

- 27.2 The referred student will receive the decision in writing no more than 7 calendar days after the FtP Panel hearing.
- 27.3 All communication related to paper-based outcomes will follow the same communication principles.
- 27.4 Should there be any delays to the referred student receiving the outcome, the SRC Team will update the student on the revised timeframes.

## **28 Final Formal Review (FFR) – Internal Review**

- 28.1 The student can request a FFR if they have grounds to believe:
  - 28.1.1 There is new evidence that could not have been, or for good reason, was not made available at the time of the hearing.
  - 28.1.2 Evidence can be produced of significant procedural errors made during the FtP or investigatory process.
  - 28.1.3 Any remedy or outcome proposed is manifestly unreasonable.
- 28.2 Students requesting a Final Formal Review must complete and submit a [Final Formal Request Form](#) to the Student Resolution and Compliance Team at [ffr@rvc.ac.uk](mailto:ffr@rvc.ac.uk) within **14 calendar days** of the FtP outcome. Full details and process are outlined in the [Final Formal Review Procedures](#).

## **29 Completion of procedures**

- 29.1 If the RVC determines that an appeal is unjustified or that a case is not permitted to proceed under the FFR Procedures, the RVC will provide a Completion of Procedures (CoP) letter to the student. This letter will include an explanation of the decision reached.
- 29.2 A CoP letter is required should the student wish to advance a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE) regarding the FtP Procedure. The RVC will usually only issue a CoP letter once the FtP Procedure has concluded and a final decision has been provided to the student.

### **30 Office of Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE)**

- 32.1 Students who are dissatisfied with the outcome of a FFR can apply to the OIAHE for an independent review. Requests for OIAHE review must be made no later than 12 months after the FFR decision.
- 32.2 Further guidance on submitting a complaint to the OIA and the OIA Complaint Form can also be found on the OIA's website: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students/can-you-complain-to-us/>.

### 33. Fitness to Practise Types, Examples and Actions Table

Concerns surrounding Fitness to Practise (FtP) are not limited to the examples stated below. The FtP types, examples and actions are intended as non-punitive and are there to help support and resolve any FtP concerns including giving a clear expectation on the potential consequences that more serious FtP concerns can have on a referred student's progression and or termination of study.

Any student(s) can be referred to the [RVC Student Fitness to Practise Procedure](#) should there be cause for concern around a student's behaviour, conduct or health which may be in breach of [The RVC Charter](#), [RCVS Code for Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons](#), [RCVS Code for Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses](#), [General Regulations for Study and Award](#), or may cause reputational damage to the RVC, the profession or an individual.

	Concern Type	Examples of issues leading to a referral to Fitness to Practise	Examples of Actions and professional development measures
Minor concerns	Health	Showing early signs or concerns of <b>not</b> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>being able to manage an illness during studies on or off campus e.g. repeatedly not notifying a member of staff before taking sick leave and returning home.</li> <li>Engaging with support and advice to manage any ongoing health concern(s).</li> <li>Declaring medication that might alter a student's behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Written/ verbal apology by way of mediation.</li> <li>Reminder to be vigilant around professional behaviours.</li> <li>Provide advice and support to help improve professionalism moving forward i.e. signposting to directed learning sessions with professional studies and/or RVC or RVCS codes of conduct.</li> <li>Recommendation to attend RVC Support Services i.e. disability advisor, SPD system for deferrals or interruptions.</li> </ul>
	Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failure to appropriately care for animals through neglect or carelessness (minor, isolated incident not resulting in lasting harm).</li> <li>Behaviours which hold the potential to compromise the welfare of animals and, if left unaddressed, could amount to an escalation of harm.</li> <li>Not being able to follow clinical health and safety protocols (with appropriate support measures in place if indicated)</li> </ul>	
	Conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic misconduct, which demonstrates the referred student has either been reflective or shown an ability to take ownership of their mistakes within the previous procedure.</li> <li>Breach of process which has not resulted in harm or risk to the safety of the students, others, or animals.</li> <li>Not following instructions results in minor aggravations to the student or RVC.</li> <li>Posting images of people or animals without the owner's permission, which would not be expected to result in distress or concern to the person/owner.</li> <li>Posting material on internet sites that contain offensive material, or where posting of material might be considered to bring the RVC or the professions into disrepute by association (e.g., pornography sites).</li> <li>Making unwanted remarks of a sexual nature.</li> <li>Non-verbal harassment e.g., sending unwanted emails or messages containing sexual content.</li> <li>Threats to hurt another person.</li> <li>Acting in an intimidating and hostile manner.</li> <li>Acting unprofessionally either during a learning session, or clinical environment which disrupts the learning or teaching of others.</li> <li>Micro-aggressions against an individual's protected characteristic* that result from ignorance or stereotyping, rather than be intentionally hurtful.</li> </ul>	

Intermediate concerns	Concern Type	Examples of issues leading to a referral to Fitness to Practise	Examples of Actions and professional development measures
	Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failure or inability to seek medical treatment or other support.</li> <li>Refusal or inability to follow medical advice or treatment plans.</li> <li>Poor mental or physical health or serious physical impairment that could impair decision-making ability during a clinical environment.</li> <li>Not declaring an illness or medication which could impair decision-making ability during a clinical environment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Written/ verbal apology by way of mediation.</li> <li>Notifying the RVCSU to review and consider the justified outcome against the referred students involvement with RVCSU social events and/or their RVC representations.</li> </ul>
	Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inappropriate use of personal information.</li> <li>Failure to care for animals resulting in harm where this is non-deliberate (e.g., through ignorance or neglect).</li> <li>Being dishonest in clinical record keeping.</li> <li>Deliberate/knowning infringements of health and safety regulations, especially those of a more serious nature i.e., removing and damaging fire preventative equipment.</li> <li>Substance misuse e.g. drugs, alcohol and other substances that can impair performance.</li> <li>Actions or incidents which amount to a lack of insight into the code of professional behaviour and standards.</li> <li>Taking risk which compromises student, staff, client, and animal welfare.</li> <li>Unsafe practice, incompetence or requiring too much supervision.</li> <li>Poor self-management and /or repeated history of not following deadlines or advice e.g. in completing EMS or AHMS deadlines, paperwork, or SPD outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage in additional learning opportunities to enhance their professional and clinical development e.g. offer a period of voluntary time or services to the RVC (helping at Boltons Farm or events hosted by the Animal Care Trust and RVCSU).</li> <li>Compulsory attendance at a workshop/ coaching session.</li> <li>Compulsory directed learning workshops.</li> </ul>
	Conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repeated minor infringements which are disrupting the health and safety of others and animals.</li> <li>Repeated academic misconduct (of the same nature) which demonstrates the referred student has shown little or no reflection and/or ability to take ownership of their mistakes.</li> <li>Misuse of social media policy.</li> <li>Serious or intentional breaches of client confidentiality.</li> <li>Proven disciplinary offences (for example antisocial, abusive, or threatening behaviour, sexual misconduct, violence, bullying or harassment, damage to property, internet access abuse, substance/ alcohol abuse) which shows the referred student has not been reflective or shown an ability to take ownership of their mistakes within the previous procedure.</li> <li>Inaccurate or falsified placement documentation.</li> <li>Inappropriate or offensive behaviour towards fellow students, staff, clients, or placement providers</li> <li>Aggressive, threatening, harassing or violent behaviour.</li> <li>Dishonesty, cheating or plagiarising, including dishonesty outside the professional role.</li> <li>Breach of process or conduct which has resulted in harm or risk to the safety of the students, others, or animals.</li> <li>Discriminate against an individual based on their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or beliefs, or national origin.</li> <li>Not following instructions which results in significant aggravations to the student or RVC.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Study i.e., referral to an SPD meeting.</li> <li>Clinical practice conditions such as a requirement to attend UK-only placements.</li> <li>Engage with occupational health, health authorities or disability support for managing a student's health and professional progression.</li> <li>Instruct an interruption of study to support medical treatment or remedial action.</li> <li>In addition to the above actions, the FtP Panel may implement study or clinical condition(s) to support remedial action.</li> </ul>



	Concern Type	Examples of issues leading to a referral to Fitness to Practise	Examples of Actions and professional development measures
Major concerns	Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Despite reasonable adjustments or supportive arrangements demonstrating a failure or inability to seek medical treatment or engage in support to aid progression.</li> <li>▪ Despite reasonable adjustments or supportive arrangements demonstrating a refusal or inability to follow medical advice or treatment plans.</li> <li>▪ Not declaring an illness or medication which has caused a lack of insight resulting in harm or injury to another animal or person.</li> <li>▪ Taking unnecessary risks and compromising animal welfare.</li> <li>▪ Deliberately ignoring or failing to follow instructions or advice.</li> <li>▪ Demonstrating a serious or persistent lack of insight into their limitations and lack of experience due to an ongoing or undisclosed health or disability.</li> <li>▪ Deliberate and severe health and safety breaches, e.g. not following clinical or laboratory instructions, which have resulted in avoidable danger around animals or a clinical environment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Written/ verbal apology by way of mediation.</li> <li>▪ Make permanent or periodic withdrawal of privileges e.g., from out of hours facilities, RVCSU social events or representation duties.</li> <li>▪ A written reflective essay.</li> <li>▪ Compulsory attendance at a workshop/ coaching session.</li> <li>▪ Compulsory directed learning workshops.</li> <li>▪ Interruption of study for a period of no longer than 12 months.</li> <li>▪ That the student's enrolment on the programme of study be suspended pending medical treatment or other appropriate remedial action within the normal registration period for the course.</li> <li>▪ That a referred student's enrolment on the registered programme of study be terminated i.e. a referred student is withdrawn from the RVC and no longer has a right to study as an RVC student.<sup>4</sup></li> <li>▪ In addition to the above actions, the FtP Panel may implement study or clinical condition(s) to support remedial action.</li> </ul>
	Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Demonstrating a serious or persistent lack of insight into their limitations and lack of experience</li> <li>▪ Deliberately ignoring or failing to follow instructions, advice or processes while in the clinical or study environment on or off campus.</li> <li>▪ Substance misuse, e.g. drugs, alcohol and other substances that can impair performance.</li> <li>▪ Persistence of unsafe practice, incompetence or requiring too much supervision.</li> <li>▪ Falsely completing/signing documentation</li> <li>▪ Purporting to have qualifications that they do not have.</li> <li>▪ Failure to respect a client's instructions or going beyond the scope of consent.</li> </ul>	
	Conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cause undue distress or provoke anti-social or violent behaviour.</li> <li>▪ Repeatedly threatening to hurt another person and/or causing deliberate injury to another person.</li> <li>▪ Inappropriate use of the internet or social media, which can cause offence and be regarded as bullying or harassment or reputational damage to the RVC or an individual.</li> <li>▪ Deliberate infringement of health and safety regulations resulting in injury (or anticipated injury) to self or others.</li> <li>▪ Intent to obtain or supply drugs inappropriately obtained through veterinary channels. Use of recreational drugs when in a clinical setting. Dishonesty, cheating or plagiarising, including dishonesty outside the professional role.</li> <li>▪ Dishonesty within clinical responsibilities other than an assessment-based task for example, documented evidence to support patient reports have been doctored or falsified one or more times.</li> <li>▪ Causing deliberate harm to animals through neglect and ignorance (other than for accepted husbandry or veterinary purposes, such as tail-ringing or neutering for example).</li> <li>▪ Actions causing major reputational damage to the RVC or the profession.</li> <li>▪ Failure to comply with precautionary measures set by the RVC as part of the Misconduct Procedures.</li> <li>▪ Failure to disclose convictions or other information that the student is required to disclose.</li> <li>▪ Failure to disclose an ongoing RCVS disciplinary investigation or outcome</li> </ul>	

*Definition: Having a protected characteristics means you have the right not to be treated less favourable or subjected to an unfair advantage by reason of that characteristics for example, because of race, gender, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity or civil partnership.*

<sup>4</sup> Admission to an alternative non-RCVS programme will be decided in accordance with the admission criteria.