Abbeydale
VET NURSE TRAINING

Issue number 18 Winter 2026
www.vetnursetraining.co.uk

Staying in touch



Supporting Professional Behaviours in Student Veterinary Nurses: A Practical Guide for Clinical Coaches

Clinical coaching is far more than supervising clinical skills—it's about modelling, nurturing, and assessing the professional behaviours that underpin safe, ethical, and compassionate veterinary nursing. The RCVS Professional Behaviours and Attributes framework provides a clear structure for this, helping coaches support students' development and intervene early when standards slip.

Professional behaviours sit at the heart of safe, ethical veterinary nursing, and their impact reaches far beyond the individual student. When students develop strong professional habits early, everyone benefits: the learner, the practice team, Abbeydale as the training provider, and the RCVS as the regulator safeguarding public trust.

For the Student: Building Confidence, Identity, and Success

Good professional behaviours help students grow into capable, confident future RVNs. Clear communication, reliability, reflective practice, and working within competence all support safer learning and smoother progression.

Early Training (First 6–9 Months) – "Orientation & Foundations"
Students at this stage may be overwhelmed, anxious, or unsure of expectations.
Focus on potential and engagement, not perfection. Early-stage students should not be penalised for inexperience.

Mid-Training (12–18 Months) – "Growing Independence"
Students should now be demonstrating Level 2–3 behaviours.
Use multiple evidence sources, not just one shift or one person's perspective.

Final Stage (Near Completion) – "Readiness for Registration"
Students should be consistently demonstrating Level 4 behaviours.
Assess consistency over time, not isolated incidents.

For the Practice: Supporting Safety, Teamwork, and Client Trust

A student's behaviour influences the whole practice environment. Professionalism improves team cohesion, reduces risk, and helps maintain high standards of animal care.



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Supporting Professional Behaviours in Student Veterinary Nurses

For Abbeydale: Upholding Standards and Supporting Fair, Transparent Training

Professional behaviours are central to Abbeydale's mission to deliver high-quality, ethical veterinary nurse education. They ensure students meet RCVS Day One expectations and help maintain robust, fair assessment processes. Early identification and support for behavioural concerns protect both students and practices, while reinforcing Abbeydale's commitment to clarity, integrity, and learner wellbeing.

For the RCVS: Protecting the Profession and Public Confidence

As the regulator, the RCVS relies on training providers and practices to nurture the behaviours that underpin fitness to practise. Professional behaviours safeguard animal welfare, support consistent national standards, and reduce the risk of complaints or disciplinary action.

Recording the professional behaviours on the CSL

INITIAL ASSESSMENT (6–9 months)

Learner & Clinical Coach hold a professional discussion

Learner: Selects their level for all 10 criteria and adds rationale (note or uploaded document)

Clinical Coach: Clicks "Shown" and "Demonstrated" on CSL, selects learner's level for all criteria and adds rationale for each criterion.

INTERMEDIATE ASSESSMENT (12–18 months)

Learner: Selects their level for all 10 criteria and adds rationale (note or uploaded document)

Clinical Coach: Selects learner's level for all criteria and adds rationale for each criterion.

FINAL ASSESSMENT (Near completion)

Learner: Selects their level for all 10 criteria, adds rationale and marks assessment as **CLAIMED**

Clinical Coach: Selects learner's level for all 10 criteria, adds rationale and marks assessment as **CHECKED**

As part of our commitment to supporting both learners and clinical coaches, Abbeydale will send timely reminders throughout each student's training to let you know when their Professional Behaviour assessments are due on the CSL. You're never on your own with this process. Our team is always here to answer questions, offer guidance, and help you navigate any concerns that arise. We'll also be exploring the Professional Behaviours framework in much greater depth during this year's Clinical Coach Standardisation events, giving you the chance to build confidence, share experiences, and strengthen your approach to supporting students' professional growth.



Bananas, Beetle, Bug & Brilliant Advice:
MEET HIL VARLOW



Meet Hil Varlow, our Lead IQA and a cornerstone of Abbeydale's commitment to excellence. With nearly four decades in veterinary nursing, Hil brings a blend of wisdom, humour, and heartfelt passion to everything she does. We sat down with her to talk animals, snacks, inventions, and the advice she wishes every aspiring vet nurse could hear.

What is your favourite animal, and why?
I'm torn between dogs and horses. If I absolutely had to choose, I think I'd land on dogs, not because they're "better," but because of how deeply relational they are. They're endlessly tuned in: watching faces, learning patterns, adapting to humans in a way that feels almost collaborative. Training a good dog doesn't feel like control; it feels like a shared language slowly clicking into place. That moment when they get it is pure magic.
I currently have two dogs, Beetle and Bug, and I love training both of them. Their personalities are so different that I'm constantly learning from them just as much as they learn from me.
That said… horses come in a very close second. There's something about their sensitivity and honesty. You can't fake anything around a horse—they read your emotional state instantly. Working with them feels quieter, heavier, more reflective, like a conversation happening mostly beneath the surface. Whether I'm nursing them, riding them, or caring for them day to day, from 12hh to 17hh and in all weathers, I truly enjoy it.

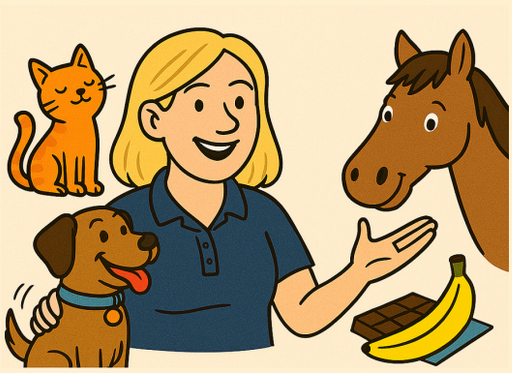
If you could swap lives with an animal for a day, which one would you choose and why?
Probably a cat—an owned and loved cat. A cat's life has this perfect balance of independence and indulgence. Long stretches of doing absolutely nothing, followed by brief, intense bursts of purpose: staring out windows, hunting imaginary enemies, knocking things off shelves just because it feels right.
You're curious, agile, and entirely on your own terms but still warm, fed, and quietly adored. Cats feel like they've cracked the code: minimal effort, maximum comfort, and just enough mystery to keep life interesting.

What was your favourite snack to recharge after a busy day in practice?
Banana first, then chocolate. It's my body's way of saying, "I have kept things alive today and now require potassium and comfort."
The banana is the sensible one—repairing muscles and stabilising blood sugar like a responsible adult. The chocolate is my inner voice on the sofa murmuring, "You've earned this."
After a day full of animals, bodily fluids, and emotional whiplash, I need something that involves no thinking and delivers instant joy. Banana and chocolate aren't just a snack—it's survival. Self-care, conveniently wrapped in a peel.

If you could invent a new tool to make veterinary nursing easier, what would it do?
Hands-Free Support Panels & Wraps. These would be soft, adaptive panels and gentle wraps that hold animals securely. They'd mould to the patient's body, providing calming pressure and stability—so no nurse needs to use their elbow, chin, and knee at once.
Just imagine it:

- Fewer staff needed (no more shouting, "Can someone be a bum stop?"
- Eliminates the classic vet-nurse stance: bent, twisted, and questioning life choices
- Reduces long-term injuries caused by pretending you're a human sandbag

Basically, it's the extra nurse every clinic needs—quiet, tireless, and incapable of calling in sick.



What advice would you give to someone dreaming of becoming a vet nurse?
Persevere. Veterinary nursing can be a difficult career to get into, and the training is incredibly demanding. However, after nearly 40 years in the profession, I can honestly say I still absolutely love it—and it is well worth the effort.

Every day is different, and the relationships you build with pets, their owners, and the amazing colleagues you work alongside make it a truly rewarding career.

Being a Training Provider/Skills Infrastructure Organisation

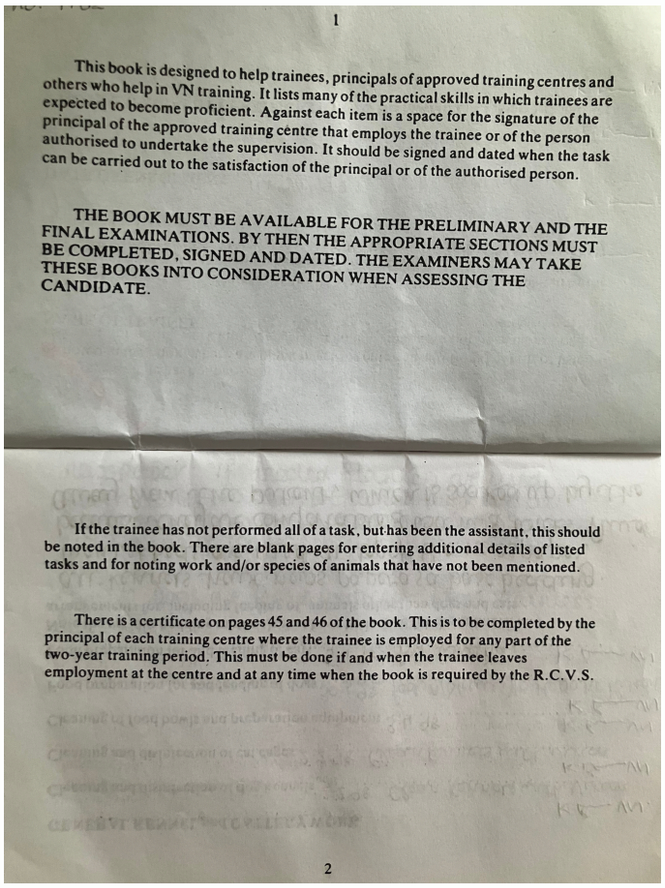
This newsletter is slightly different. In this edition, we are going to be providing you with some inside information about being a training provider and the requirements for qualification delivery.

Firstly, a step back in time.....

Abbeydale was founded in 1998 by Victoria Aspinall (Vicky). Vicky was one of the very first trailblazers for independent veterinary nurse training/education, by setting up Abbeydale in Gloucester above her husband's veterinary practice. Vicky was a passionate educator and champion for quality veterinary nurse education. Vicky had steadfast and high standards, always working hard to impart information and her knowledge to the next generation of student nurses. It was from these unwavering standards that her nursing school developed and flourished.

For those of us who are more 'mature in qualification years', you will remember a time when funding was not available for the veterinary nursing program, where most learners paid their own course fees. You may also remember the significance of belts and how important they were. A black belt indicated a first-year student nurse. Once you passed the first-year exams, a grey belt was worn. Only once you qualified were you permitted to wear green and sport a green belt. These belts meant a lot because they signified the stage of training and assessment that was clear for all to see. It also provided a significant drive to achieve the next colour belt!

The veterinary nursing qualification was assessed in two parts, Part 1 and Part 2. The clinical/practical element was assessed via the 'Green Book', and practical examinations, and the RCVS was the Awarding Organisation as well as the regulator. In 1999, the qualifications were updated and modernised, and the 'written portfolio' was implemented. Fast forward again, to the current modern day, where the assessment method is largely the same (written and practical assessments), the learner is now heavily supported by Apprenticeship Funding.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This book is designed to help trainees, principals of approved training centres and others who help in VN training. It lists many of the practical skills in which trainees are expected to become proficient. Against each item is a space for the signature of the principal of the approved training centre that employs the trainee or of the person authorised to undertake the supervision. It should be signed and dated when the task can be carried out to the satisfaction of the principal or of the authorised person.

THE BOOK MUST BE AVAILABLE FOR THE PRELIMINARY AND THE FINAL EXAMINATIONS. BY THEN THE APPROPRIATE SECTIONS MUST BE COMPLETED, SIGNED AND DATED. THE EXAMINERS MAY TAKE THESE BOOKS INTO CONSIDERATION WHEN ASSESSING THE CANDIDATE.

If the trainee has not performed all of a task, but has been the assistant, this should be noted in the book. There are blank pages for entering additional details of listed tasks and for noting work and/or species of animals that have not been mentioned.

There is a certificate on pages 45 and 46 of the book. This is to be completed by the principal of each training centre where the trainee is employed for any part of the two-year training period. This must be done if and when the trainee leaves employment at the centre and at any time when the book is required by the R.C.V.S.

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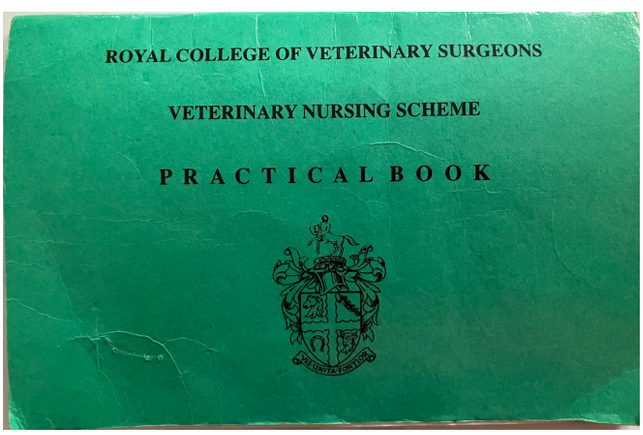
ROYAL COLLEGE OF VETERINARY SURGEONS

VETERINARY NURSING SCHEME

PRACTICAL BOOK

Over the last 25 years, there have been significant changes, such as the RCVS ceasing to be an Awarding Organisation and 'new' examination boards being granted permission to develop their syllabi around the RCVS Day One Skills and Competencies and veterinary nursing being granted Government funding support.

For Abbeydale to be in a position to facilitate learners having their course funded, we had to apply to be on the Register of Apprenticeship Providers. The application was lengthy and rigorous. Upon successful completion and acceptance to the register, we are required to accept the terms and conditions imposed, such as audits from the HMRC, Department for Education (DfE), and the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and Estyn, which is the inspectorate for education and training in Wales, as well as the Awarding Organisation (Central Qualifications) and the RCVS. Some audits take place annually, and others will take place on an inspection cycle, such as Ofsted/Estyn.

Ultimately, each inspectorate is seeking information and evidence on the quality of education and learning that is taking place, so that the learners are making consistent and timely progression on their award. Are students safe in their working and learning environment, and are they and Abbeydale working in line with applicable legislation, whilst undertaking and evidencing appropriate monitoring and audits of learners' progress?

We are working with two different sets of funding rules imposed on us: the Welsh and English Apprenticeship Funding Rules, which do differ slightly. The funding rules dictate certain activities and timelines that Abbeydale have to adhere to. Such as undertaking learner reviews every 12 weeks for English and every 6 weeks for Welsh apprentices, while supporting learners to achieve their qualification in line with the originally planned completion target. This is evidenced by monthly Individual Learner Reports about the learner's progression to the DfE. Should we make an incorrect data entry, the DfE's 'claw back' will result in our income being reduced.

Whilst working to be compliant with the funding rules, CQ and RCVS requirements, we must also aim to meet compliance with the Ofsted inspection framework, which inspects Abbeydale's safeguarding, inclusion, quality of education, leadership and governance, behaviours and attitudes, apprenticeship quality and student participation.

Since Abbeydale's early inception, it has evolved and developed significantly over the last 15 years. As every business understands, compliance requirements increase year on year, and businesses need to evolve. Education is no different. To meet the demands and developing requirements of individual learners, the practices and the regulatory bodies require compliance, input and understanding from all parties of what is contractually and professionally required.

Below is a summary of the roles and responsibilities of each organisation.

Ofsted/Estyn

They aim to ensure that standards of education are maintained by undertaking inspections and evaluations of the quality of education against a set of criteria. All levels of education from pre-school to further education are assessed using the same criteria, with the overarching aim to improve the education that is delivered to children and young people in England and Wales. Ofsted report their findings to the DfE.

Department for Education (DfE)

The DfE sets education policy for all levels of education, starting at early years to further and higher education. It also sets the policy for apprenticeships and skills acquisition. The DfE funds education and skills, manages qualifications and assessments to provide value for money where taxpayers' funds are used. It uses the data that is submitted by schools, colleges, training providers and universities to inform decisions and educational outcomes.

The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (OFQUAL) and Qualifications Wales (QW)

OFQUAL are a government department in England that regulates the qualifications delivered and assessed. Qualifications Wales is a government department in Wales that regulates qualifications delivered and assessed in Wales. It does this by ensuring that regulated qualifications can reliably indicate the knowledge, skills and understanding students have acquired and can demonstrate. This is achieved by having a robust qualification syllabus with suitable assessment methods to ensure knowledge and skill acquisition. Both the L3 Veterinary Nursing Diploma and the L2 Veterinary Nurse Assistant qualifications have to be approved by the respective inspectorates to be eligible for apprenticeship funding.

Central Qualifications (CQ)

CQ is described as an awarding organisation (AO). An AO designs and develops qualifications which are then regulated by OFQUAL/QW. The AO are then permitted to award certificates/qualifications to individuals who have successfully completed and achieved all assessment criteria. They are required to have robust quality assurance procedures, such as sampling a learners work to ensure that the training provider is assessing correctly and that the qualification integrity is maintained. The AO has to meet the requirements which are set by OFQUAL/QW.

Veterinary nursing is a very unique qualification, where all learners, training providers and awarding organisations have to be compliant with the rules set by OFQUAL and QW, but there also has to be compliance with the rules set and imposed by the RCVS and the Veterinary Surgeons Act. This makes the qualification very heavily regulated, requiring compliance with multiple organisations.

At Abbeydale, we try our best to understand all of the rules and requirements of all of the inspectorates and agencies, producing a set of consistent rules which are applied to all learners, so that every learner/employer is managed the same, regardless of which government agency (Wales or England) is funding the learner.

Being inspected and audited by all of the inspectorates detailed above, and that Abbeydale has never wavered from its mission to produce the best veterinary nurses and nurse assistants, you can be assured that Abbeydale try very hard to make sure that every learner has excellent teaching and standards of education provided, which then produces staff which are a valuable asset to the employer meeting the business requirements and needs.