



Professionalism in Action

A Guide for Chiropractic Students on Being Fit to Practise

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Introduction

About us

We are the General Chiropractic Council and we work to protect the public and help make sure that patients having chiropractic treatment are safe.

Only chiropractors that are registered with us can treat patients in the UK.

We set the education standards and help develop the chiropractic profession to ensure they have the right skills, are trained to deliver excellent patient care and meet our standards.

What this document is about

This document is for chiropractic students and gives information about the standards of professional and personal behaviour that we expect. We hope this guidance is helpful during your training.

It is important that from day one of your training, you make sure your practice meets the standards we set out in the [Code](#).

We are always interested in hearing you think about our work and in making improvements. If you have any comments on this document, please send to education@gcc-uk.org

What does being professional mean?

Patients need chiropractors they can trust. As a student you must:

- make the care of your patient your first concern
- be honest and trustworthy
- work within the limits of your knowledge and skills
- have good working relationships with patients and colleagues
- respect confidentiality
- communicate effectively
- be open when things go wrong
- report concerns about safety
- keep records of your work with patients.

What is meant by professional boundaries?

This means using your position of trust responsibly so that patients feel confident that they are in safe hands, that you are acting in their best interests and providing the best possible care.

Being able to develop and maintain good professional relationships is a vital part of learning how to become a chiropractor.

Any breach of professional boundaries may call your fitness to practise into question. This may affect your ability to continue studying.

What does student fitness to practise mean?

It is professionalism in action. In your training to become a chiropractor, you have certain responsibilities. You will need to show that both your personal and professional conduct is of the high standards expected.

We expect you to:

- behave professionally
- take responsibility for your own health and well being
- deliver safe and competent care.

Student fitness to practise includes assessing your:

- clinical and academic work
- professional behaviour
- health so you can practise safely.

In very serious circumstances, your conduct may affect your chances of:

- completing your education
- gaining your final qualification
- and being able to register with us.

If you fall below the standard expected in any of these areas, your university or college may consider whether you are fit to practise. Misconduct may affect your ability to complete your course.

Where to find more information and support

Both the General Chiropractic Council and your education provider are keen to help you develop your professionalism during your training. Your university or college will help you learn about professionalism throughout your course.

If you have a problem with meeting the expected standards that are beyond your control (such as a disability or other extenuating circumstances) you should speak to your education provider in the first instance.

You may also want to confide in your personal tutor or student counsellor to make sure you get the right support and guidance to help you continue your education.

We have produced a version of this guidance for education and training providers, which you can read if you wish by visiting www.gcc-uk.org/education/undergraduate-education/information-for-chiropractic-schools.aspx

This student guide, and the accompanying one for education providers, have been informed by the work of the other healthcare professional regulators.

What is the General Chiropractic Council?

Patients need good healthcare professionals who:

- they can trust
- will take good care of them
- are competent in what they do
- are honest, act with integrity and keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date.

The General Chiropractic Council's (GCC) role is to protect the public by developing and regulating the profession of chiropractic. We do this by:

- 1 registering chiropractors – it is illegal in the UK for anyone to describe themselves as a chiropractor, or to imply that they are a chiropractor, if they are not registered with us
- 2 setting standards of chiropractic education for individuals who are training to become chiropractors
- 3 setting standards of professional conduct and practice for those who are practising as chiropractors - these standards are described in our *Code* <http://www.gcc-uk.org/good-practice/> We also investigate any serious allegations about any chiropractor whose behaviour or conduct has been questioned. Where necessary we place restrictions on how that individual practises or, in very rare cases, remove them from the register so they can no longer practise as a chiropractor in the UK.

Individuals on our register commit to keeping to the standards set out in our *Code* <http://www.gcc-uk.org/good-practice/> This means that they take personal responsibility for maintaining professional standards of practice – this is the first level of regulation where an individual as a professional regulates themselves. Deciding whether you are – and remain – fit to practise, and able to ensure the safety of patients and the public, is a basic professional responsibility, and a matter for every chiropractor to decide for themselves. That is why developing this capability while you are a student is so important. This personal responsibility extends to being able to evaluate your own health and making any necessary changes to the way you work so that you can continue to provide good standards of practice and care. This applies to all registered chiropractors, whether or not they have a pre-existing health condition or disability.

We do not:

- have a direct role in dealing with individual cases of student fitness to practise
- intervene if students are disciplined because of fitness to practise concerns.

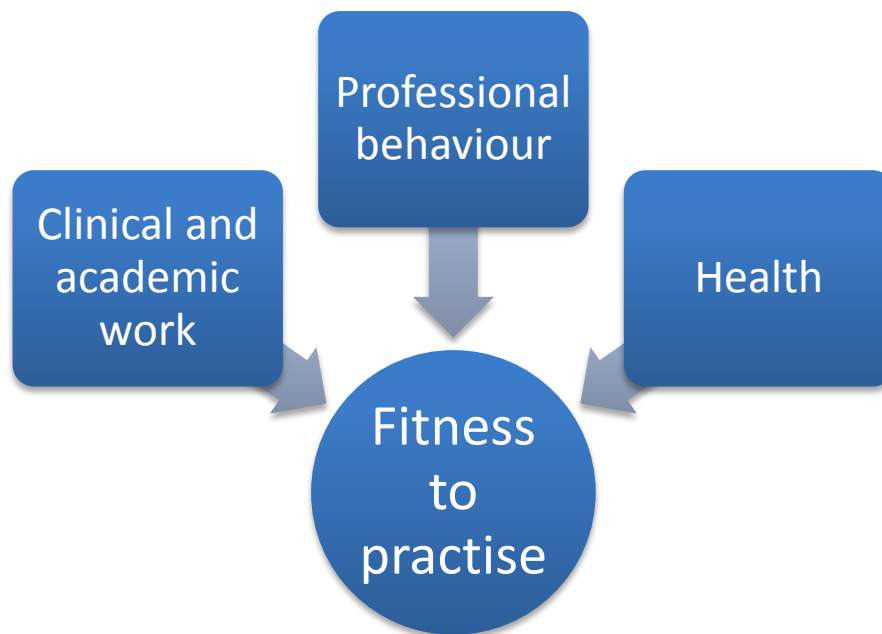
As part of our process for recognising a chiropractic degree programme, we check that education providers have student fitness to practise policies in place and that they will apply them when required. Every year we collect information from education providers about their use of student fitness to practise procedures. We also expect education providers to tell us about any student who has been dismissed from the course for fitness to practise reasons.

When you apply to register with us, you will be asked to declare any sanctions you received as a result of a student fitness to practise investigation (see later in this guidance).

Our overall duties as a regulator are reflected in our approach to student fitness to practise and the role that education providers play in the process.

What is meant by student fitness to practise?

Student fitness to practise is about being able to meet the requirements of your education and training programme so that you can demonstrate that you are fit to be entered onto the GCC register. These requirements are demonstrating sufficient knowledge, skills and competence, behaving professionally and being in good health. They come together into how we think about fitness to practise as shown in the diagram below.



Student fitness to practise has three constituent parts:

1. your clinical and academic work – this will form much of the focus of your development as a student. Each of the modules that you take is intended to help you gain the requisite knowledge and skills and in time apply these in practice
2. your professional behaviour – this is the main aspect that is considered in this guidance note as it forms a key component of fitness to practise.
3. your health – this will affect your ability to concentrate and perform and might also affect your behaviour. Its effect will be felt throughout your working life and beyond. Your education provider will take steps to make reasonable adjustments to help you manage any disability or health condition that you have. Your health can affect the extent to which you can be fit to practise and you will have to learn how to take this into account and modify your behaviour if necessary to ensure you can practise safely.

Education providers are responsible for determining the fitness to practise of the students on their programmes.

As a chiropractic student, you are expected to behave in a professional way. If your behaviour falls below this level, or if there are ongoing issues with your clinical and academic work, or concerns about the impact of your health on your ability to achieve the necessary standards, then your education provider will consider if this amounts to a concern about your fitness to practise. If they make this decision they will not do so lightly and they will follow set procedures for considering this further.

What standards are expected in the initial training and education of chiropractors?

We set out what individuals have to achieve at the point of graduation from recognised chiropractic education programmes. We do this by setting two forms of education standards <http://www.gcc-uk.org/education/education-standards/>

- learning outcomes - these define:
 - the broad content that has to be covered in a chiropractic degree
 - what you as a student will be assessed against to graduate with a chiropractic degree
- criteria that the institution offering the degree programme has to meet to ensure that students receive a high quality education to help them develop to become reflective, self-critical and effective primary healthcare practitioners.

The learning outcomes reflect *The Code* <http://www.gcc-uk.org/good-practice/> which is structured against eight principles that together form the standards for conduct, performance and ethics for chiropractors.

From when you first start on your education programme through to when you graduate, you have the responsibility to:

- familiarise yourself with and become aware of:
 - the standards expected of you as a chiropractic student as set out in this document
 - the learning outcomes you are working towards achieving by the end of your course
- discuss any concerns you have about your own or another student's behaviour or performance with your education provider
- raise any patient safety concerns with your education provider
- know what you need to declare when you apply to be registered as a chiropractor at the end of your degree programme.

What is student professionalism?

Training to become a chiropractor offers a number of exciting opportunities but it also carries a significant responsibility. This is because patients and the public trust that health professionals will practise competently and behave appropriately towards them.

Patients have described the following about their views and expectations of chiropractic care

“It’s a type of therapy that can make you feel quite vulnerable and you need to know you are in safe pair of hands.”

“It’s difficult to be involved because it’s a manipulative therapy that is being done to you and so you can’t be very proactive in the actual treatment – you are essentially giving yourself over to the chiropractor.”

“She gives you information as she’s going through it (the treatment) and why she’s doing things as well, so you’re not kept in the dark in any way. Also, not only does she sit you down before you go in and listens to what you’re saying, she does the work with you and then tells you what she’s found, what she’s done and if there is any need for anything else, she’ll tell you”.

From: Firefly and The University of York, 2013, Research into patients’ views and expectations of chiropractic care – final report from the study, London, GCC. <https://www.gcc-uk.org/UserFiles/Docs/FireflyfinalreportJan13.pdf>

Patients place a similar trust in healthcare students. As a chiropractic student you will be developing your knowledge, skills and practice as you work with other students as proxy patients. You will have access to confidential patient information, and eventually you will be assessing and caring for patients in clinics.

Patients enable you as a student to develop your knowledge and skills initially fully supported by registered chiropractors and then increasingly on your own as you take greater responsibility for the assessment and care of patients yourself. You must repay this support by being honest and trustworthy and also by giving each patient due care and attention. Being a student in a healthcare discipline means that you are different to students on other degree programmes as you need to think about your behaviour in all aspects of your life, both when studying at your institution and when in public.

Student professionalism is:

- the way you respond to the standards that are required of you during training (including when faced with different issues)

- being able to demonstrate appropriate behaviour and attitudes towards patients and to your colleagues, whether this is other students, the staff on your training course or others
- developing the ability to seek support and guidance for your learning and development and potentially your health
- developing the ability to reflect on the feedback you receive and to respond positively when you are made aware of any issues and offered advice and support.

We recognise that the way you respond and your knowledge and understanding will change over time as you progress through your course. The situations that you experience will help this process and contribute to your professionalism and fitness to practise.

Why does my personal life need to be considered?

As you have chosen to pursue a career as a healthcare professional, you must behave in an honest and trustworthy way and take into account how your behaviour affects others. As well as your behaviour in the professional context, your personal life counts too because it can have an effect on how you are perceived by others. As you are training to become a member of a healthcare profession, inappropriate behaviour in any setting can lead people to question how trustworthy and honest the whole profession might be if they see one member of that profession, or one of its students, act in an inappropriate way.

Table 1 gives some examples of the types of issues that might cause such concern. You might like to work with colleagues to identify other examples.

Table 1: Examples of issues that might lead to concerns about fitness to practise

Possible area of concern	Issues that might arise
Dishonesty	Falsifying documents (eg certificates) or research Falsifying patient records Forging a signature on clinic records Failing to disclose information which is relevant to your application or studies
Aggressive, violent or threatening behaviour	Bullying or intimidating others Stalking – physically or online Assault or abuse (whether physical or verbal) Violence

Possible area of concern	Issues that might arise
Unprofessional behaviour	Posting inappropriate photos of yourself or friends on social media Trolling on social media Neglect of administrative tasks such as record keeping Poor time management during your clinic year Discrimination Failure to listen to advice Breach of confidentiality Providing chiropractic assessments , adjustments, advice, treatment or care of any kind to individuals before you are qualified and when you are not being supervised Misleading patients about their care or treatment Failure to obtain proper consent from a patient
Health concerns	Lacking awareness of the affect of your condition on your work Failure to seek medical treatment or other support Refusal to follow medical advice or care plans
Drug or alcohol misuse	Driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol Alcohol consumption that affects your clinical work or the work environment Dealing, possessing or misusing drugs even if there are no legal proceedings
Criminal convictions	Sexual offences (eg accessing child pornography, child abuse) Fraud Theft Possession of illegal substances Child abuse or any other abuse Physical violence

The examples given in table 1 do not in themselves mean that an applicant to a course would not be accepted nor that a student would be excluded. It is important that individuals can understand why their behaviour is inappropriate for a healthcare professional and to learn how to change in the future. It is also vital that individuals are honest when they have done something wrong and admit to their mistakes. This links to what is known as ‘the duty of candour’.

In 2014, all of the healthcare professional regulators (including us) issued a joint statement about healthcare professionals being proactively open and honest with patients when something goes wrong with their treatment or care

https://www.gcc-uk.org/UserFiles/Docs/Publications/Who_regulates_health_and_social_care_professionals___English_1112.PDF_0952%202111.pdf

It applies to all healthcare professionals and students. Whilst the joint statement relates specifically to being open and honest with patients when mistakes are made, the principle of being honest when you have done something wrong or made an error applies across your learning and development and will last throughout your professional life. You should also encourage others to be open and honest and not discourage others from raising concerns or admitting their mistakes. Your education provider will explore this with you throughout your learning programme.

What is meant by professional boundaries?

Developing and maintaining clear professional boundaries with patients, other students and education and training staff is a fundamental aspect of learning how to become a chiropractor. Breaching professional boundaries may call your fitness to practise into question and this in turn might affect whether you can remain on the course.

With patients

During your time as a student you will probably have many discussions about the nature of professional boundaries and what they mean in practice. Essentially it means that patients must feel confident that they are safe in the hands of a healthcare professional and that the professional is acting in their best interests and providing the best possible care. Any suggestion that a healthcare professional is driven by their sexual or other desires or sees a patient as a sexual object puts this trust and confidence at risk – not only in relation to that individual professional but potentially in relation to all healthcare professionals in the future. Even as a student you will be in a power relationship to a patient as because of their health needs they will be potentially vulnerable. Any breaching of this professional boundary may give cause for concern whether it is initiated by you or by the patient.

With teaching staff

It is not just in relation to patients that boundary issues might arise. Personal relationships with teaching staff might also lead to difficulties. Each chiropractic educational provider will have their own policy on this and on how such relationships should be managed, if they are allowed at all. A general rule is that any personal relationship, whether it is familial, friendship or of a sexual nature, should be disclosed. This is so that appropriate steps can be taken to ensure there are no conflicts of interest and the quality of teaching or assessment is not compromised.

With other students

You should also consider your relationships with other students particularly given the degree of intimacy that comes about because of the physical nature of learning about chiropractic and practising your skills. Students are usually keen to practise techniques on other students and this can take place away from the educational environment. Your educational provider will have policies and guidance on this that you must comply with. You should remember that without the structure of the educational environment boundaries might easily become blurred. This can lead to misunderstandings between individuals as to where the boundary is and what is meant in such a situation. Concerns and complaints may then be raised which could affect you in the longer term.

What rights do I have as a student in relation to professional boundaries?

As someone who is developing to become a chiropractor, you must be competent to treat patients of both sexes at the point of graduation. By this is meant that you satisfy the requirements of the *Code* and the *Education Standards* and hence meet the requirements for registration.

A key way in which chiropractic students learn is through practising on each other. We encourage education providers to explain to prospective students the nature of typical, practical, peer-learning activities where students undress down to their underwear. You have a right to refuse to undress and to act as a proxy patient for other students to learn if this conflicts with your personal, religious or cultural beliefs and practices. Your education provider should have appropriate processes to manage such requests under their Equality Act 2010 obligations for recognising and promoting equality and diversity.

How will I learn to act professionally?

The GCC Code <https://www.gcc-uk.org/good-practice/> sets eight ethical principles of practice expected of registered chiropractors. These principles are:

- A. Put the health interests of patients first
- B. Act with honesty and integrity and maintain the highest standards of professional and personal conduct
- C. Provide a good standard of clinical care and practice
- D. Establish and maintain a clear professional relationship with patients
- E. Obtain informed consent for all aspects of patient care
- F. Communicate properly and effectively with patients, colleagues and other healthcare professionals
- G. Maintain, develop and work within your professional knowledge and skills
- H. Maintain and protect patients' information.

As a student of chiropractic you should start to apply these principles to your behaviour from day one of your student life. Your understanding of what the principles mean will deepen as you proceed through your course. You must act in an honest and trustworthy way throughout your programme, properly considering the effect of your actions on others. This includes in your personal life. You will be aware that, before you are able to join the programme, there will have been an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check made on you. This is to confirm that there is nothing in your background to bar you from undertaking the course.

Not all of the statements in the Code will be directly relevant when you are training although you should learn about them and understand what they mean. For example, there is no need for you to obtain your own professional insurance (as set out in standard B2) when you are a student as your training provider will have their own insurance which covers your studies. However you will need to understand how the actions you take as a student might affect your provider's insurance cover or why they ask you to act in certain ways to ensure that you will be covered by their insurance policy.

We, and your training provider, realise that you are in a learning situation and are in the process of developing into a professional so your knowledge and understanding of professional behaviour will change, develop and mature over time. The ethical complexities of healthcare, and the situations you encounter during your course, will contribute to you developing as a professional. This means that expectations about your behaviour will increase during your course with some areas being of specific concern when you are in the clinical phase of your training. However, this is not an excuse to behave inappropriately while you are in the early years of your programme. We, like your education provider, will

have concerns about any behaviour at any time (whether on the course or in your private life) that raises questions about whether you will be fit to practise as a healthcare professional. In the box below we have given some examples of the types of behaviour that have caused concerns in the past.

What are the actions and behaviours expected of me as a chiropractic student?

You have an individual responsibility to behave professionally at all times consistent with the eight principles in the *Code*. It's impossible to give a full list of all of the forms of professional behaviour that are expected of you when you are a chiropractic student or to set out those behaviours that would give cause for concern. However in table 2 we have illustrated for you the type of behaviours that would demonstrate professionalism and those that would give cause for concern against each of the eight principles in the Code.

Table 2: Professional behaviours expected of chiropractic students and those which would give cause for concern

Principle	Examples of how you can demonstrate the principles	Examples of where there would be concerns
A: Put the health interests of patients first	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> treating patients in a safe and hygienic environment monitoring risks to health and safety (including infection) raising concerns with the appropriate person when patients or the public might be put at risk being aware that your own poor health may put others at risk, and asking for and following professional advice following legislation and regulations covering the use of ionising radiation getting help immediately if someone you are providing care for has suffered harm for any reason respecting a patient's right for a second opinion safeguarding the safety and welfare of children and vulnerable adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> exposing patients or other students to risk of harm showing a lack of insight into how your health might affect the care that you give to patients neglecting the management of a health condition having misused drugs or alcohol, being dependent on them or having a criminal conviction or caution related to drugs or alcohol
B: Act with honesty and integrity and maintain the highest standards of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> being honest and genuine in your work, both academic and professional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> acting dishonestly (eg by making dishonest claims about your qualifications, experience or status; lying

Principle	Examples of how you can demonstrate the principles	Examples of where there would be concerns
professional and personal conduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cooperating with any inquiry into your health, behaviour or performance • ensuring that you are not influenced by any commercial incentives • telling your education provider (and the GCC when applying for registration) if you have received any criminal convictions or cautions • respecting patients' privacy, dignity and cultural differences • not discriminating in any way against the people you provide care for • making sure your own beliefs and values do not affect the care you give • being open with patients when anything has gone wrong fulfilling the duty of candour 	<p>about the reasons for being absent; lying on behalf of other students)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • asking someone else to do work on your behalf, which you then claim to be your own; or doing work for another student which they then claim to be their own • having a criminal conviction or caution related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – acting dishonestly or being untrustworthy (eg theft or financial fraud) – sex offences, including being involved with child pornography – physical violence – misusing drugs or alcohol. • using internet and social networking sites in a way that might bring the profession into disrepute • disobeying any of the education institution's policies and procedures • displaying rude, aggressive, violent or threatening behaviour to anyone • having a persistent inappropriate attitude towards your work, both professionally and academically • being defensive if a patient complains
C: Provide a good standard of clinical care and practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • only providing the care that is required for the patient's clinical needs and based upon the most appropriate evidence that meets patient preferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing care to another student or individual when you were not competent or insured to do so • suggesting investigations, examinations or care for your own purposes rather

Principle	Examples of how you can demonstrate the principles	Examples of where there would be concerns
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ceasing care if asked to or it is in the patient's best interest • providing guidance about other forms of care or healthcare professionals • assessing patients and providing care to the best of your ability consistent with professional standards • reviewing and reassessing the effectiveness of care plans and providing feedback to patients about the care they receive 	<p>than in the interests of the patient</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suggesting that chiropractic or private practice was by its nature better than other forms of healthcare or NHS provision
D: Establish and maintain a clear professional relationship with patients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly identifying yourself as a student • establishing and maintaining clear professional boundaries with patients • explaining to patients if there is a need for them to remove items of clothing and offering them privacy as they do so • identifying when there is a need for another person to act as a chaperone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • misleading patients, their carers or the public in any way (eg about what chiropractic can achieve) • seeking to pursue a personal relationship with someone who you have provided care for as a patient • making any comments to patients which have sexual or other content or could be construed as such • failing to maintain appropriate boundaries with patients and tutors
E: Obtain informed consent for all aspects of patient care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • giving patients and carers information and advice in a way they can understand so they can make choices and decisions about their care • explaining clearly to patients what they can expect from care, the likely outcomes and any risks and benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not getting consent from a patient or another student before assessing or treating them

Principle	Examples of how you can demonstrate the principles	Examples of where there would be concerns
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • making sure that patients have voluntarily given their consent to the assessment and care you give before you start and as the care process continues • asking for patient's consent where items of clothing need to be adjusted or removed for examination or care • gaining patient consent to share personal information with other healthcare professionals 	
F: Communicate properly and effectively with patients, colleagues and other healthcare professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • showing respect for patients by listening to them, acknowledging their views and respecting their decisions • being polite and considerate to patients and others • taking individual's communication needs and preferences into account when communicating with them • respecting college staff and the team with whom you work • valuing the role of other healthcare professionals, and those training as students in these professions, and the contribution they bring to the health and wellbeing of patients • listening to and acting upon any complaints that patients have 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • communicating poorly with patients, other students or staff • being rude to patients, other students or staff • using inappropriate language or behaviour • making comments about patients on social media sites • talking about individuals or groups of people in a derogatory way at any time on your course • discriminating against, or unjustly criticising, another student, a member of staff, or another health profession or professional • being uncooperative with other members of the team, students, administrative staff or other healthcare professionals

Principle	Examples of how you can demonstrate the principles	Examples of where there would be concerns
G: Maintain, develop and work within your professional knowledge and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognising and working within the limits of your own knowledge, skills and competence • taking your studies seriously and being aware of your own limitations and learning needs • asking for support when you need it and accepting the feedback you are given • making the best use of opportunities to learn from the knowledge and skills of other health and social care professionals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arriving late to classes, clinic or other appointments or failing to attend on a number of occasions • having a poor attitude and not being willing to carry out the required duties and tasks • failing to follow instructions from college staff or supervisors • not responding to staff who are trying to contact you or talk to you about an issue • trying out techniques on patients or other students that you have not been taught or are not skilled enough to use • practising chiropractic at times when you are not being appropriately supervised
H: Maintain and protect patients' information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping information about patients confidential • keeping patient records up-to-date and making them legible, attributable and truly representing your interaction with the patient • informing patients of any breaches of confidentiality • storing patient records securely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speaking about patients when you can be overheard by people who should not have access to the information • disclosing information about patients or other students to anyone who is not entitled to it (that is, breaching confidentiality) • identifying patients or making comments about them on social media sites • not completing patient records, leaving important information out of records or inventing aspects of the records

What support will I get to practise professionally?

Your education provider will find different ways to engage you in discussions about professionalism throughout your chiropractic course. This is not something that is left to the latter stages of the programme or your time in clinic as it should pervade all of your training. You should be taught about the meaning of professional behaviours and supported to learn how to act in a professional way. Human errors and inappropriate behaviours do occur and we all make mistakes or act impulsively – the most important thing is your response and what you do next. Your provider will give you feedback, either informally or through more formal assessments as you go through the course. This should help you understand what you have to do and how you should behave.

We expect education providers to emphasise the importance of patient expectations about professional behaviour. The focus of your programme is on achieving the requirements set out in our *Code* and *Education Standards*. When a recognised chiropractic education provider awards a recognised qualification to you, this confirms that you are capable of practising in accordance with the published and agreed standards of practice.

What if I have a health condition or disability that makes it more difficult for me to learn or behave professionally?

All students are expected to behave as responsible professionals throughout their education and training whether they are disabled or not. If you have a disability or a health condition, you should receive support and 'reasonable adjustments' to help you achieve the standards expected. However, this does not change the standards you have to achieve.

We would not expect students with a disability or health condition to be more susceptible to having their fitness to practise called into question. On the rare occasions when there are such concerns it tends to be because an individual shows a lack of insight into the nature or impact of their disability or health condition and/or does not take the necessary actions to manage their condition. As a consequence there is a detrimental impact on patient safety.

What might affect my performance as a student and who should I talk to about it?

You should enjoy your chiropractic course and find it rewarding and challenging. You will be on a steep learning curve - learning new knowledge, developing and practising new skills, meeting a range of new and different people, and developing responsibility for patient assessment and care. During this time you will also be assessed and receive feedback about how you can improve and develop further. Once you have graduated and are on the chiropractic register, you will be working in a role with lots of responsibility as a primary healthcare practitioner who can make a real difference to individuals' lives.

There are a large number of things which might affect you on your course, some of which are likely to happen to everyone at some point in their lives. Others are more directly linked to the fact of being on a demanding education programme. These issues might include:

- family commitments – partners, parents or children
- ill-health – physical or mental – whether it is your own health or that of someone close to you
- relationship issues
- stress – academic or other
- financial pressures
- bullying or harassment
- drug, alcohol or addiction issues

- study, work and social life pressures and balances
- accommodation and housing issues
- bereavement.

If you have such issues and they are affecting your concentration, behaviour or practice, it is important that you confide in an appropriate person at your institution (such as your personal tutor or student counsellor) as they can make sure you receive the right support and guidance to continue your development. If such issues are left unaddressed they might spiral out of control or appear worse to you than they are – it is important that they are not allowed to affect your fitness to practise over time. Some issues are out of our own control to influence and it is important that you can find the space to talk things through confidentially, get someone else's perspective on things and find a way forward.

If I find I am struggling, what support should be available to me?

As part of recognising chiropractic degree programmes we ensure that education providers have academic guidance, pastoral care and other support services available for students. The exact nature of these will vary between providers but is likely to include one or more of the following:

- personal tutors
- student health services
- disability advisors
- occupational health services
- counselling
- support services provided by the student union or different student groups.

We and your education provider recognise that you are on a learning programme and you will not get everything right first time or necessarily make the right choices on each occasion. However it is important for you to recognise that the aim is to provide you with a supportive environment in which you can achieve your full potential and learn how best to respond to the difficulties which you experience as a student and which you also might experience later in your professional life. If necessary, you will be helped to develop and agree a plan for managing the issue before it has the chance to develop into a fitness to practise concern. Your education provider will also think about any risks to patients and colleagues that you might pose. If the issues with which you are struggling do cause a fitness to practise concern, it might be appropriate for your education provider to offer you support alongside any fitness to practise procedures and sanctions.

What if I have concerns about another student or a member of staff?

Your primary responsibility is for the safety of patients and others in the healthcare environment. If you have concerns about the behaviour of another student or a member of staff in the educational institution, you should raise these concerns with a responsible person in the institution at the earliest opportunity.

We recognise this is a difficult thing to do as you may feel that:

- you are breaking someone's trust
- putting someone else in a difficult situation
- it will cause you problems or have implications for how you progress on the programme.

However you have a duty to put the interests of patients first. Your education provider is likely to have a policy on raising concerns or whistleblowing and this will offer further guidance on the steps you should take.

What happens if my fitness to practise is questioned as a student?

If there are specific concerns about your behaviour, then the concern will be looked at through your institution's own student fitness-to-practise policy and procedures. Our related guidance document *Student Fitness to Practise: Guidance for Chiropractic Education Providers* sets out the broad pattern your own institution's processes will follow. In the same way that we carry out fitness to practise investigations for registered chiropractors, a concern that is raised does not mean that someone's fitness to practise is necessarily considered to be impaired or that they will be disciplined. Fitness to practise policies and procedures are not designed to punish particular behaviours but to ensure patient safety and uphold trust placed in the profession. So if you do receive sanction its purpose is to protect the public and help you as a student learn and develop in the future.

An independent person (usually a member of staff who has not been involved with you or the incident) carries out an investigation by meeting with the people concerned and gathering evidence so they can gain a rounded view of the situation. If no evidence is found then the case may be dismissed at that stage. Minor issues may be resolved by agreeing additional support and/or supervision for a set period. More serious or persistent issues will be referred to a fitness to practise panel in your institution. Members of the panel, who might be chiropractors, educationists and lay people, will not be people connected to the case.

If your fitness to practise is found to be impaired, then a range of sanctions will be considered ranging from a warning through to dismissal from the programme for very serious offences as described below:

- warnings – a warning is designed to emphasise that the behaviour is inappropriate and should not be repeated
- undertakings – an undertaking usually occurs when a student acknowledges that they have behaved inappropriately and agrees what they should do to address the behaviour
- conditions – a condition is placed on a student when there is significant concern about their behaviour or health. A condition sets clear expectations of what the student has to do by when to address the original shortcomings
- suspension from all or part of the course – a student may be suspended from the course to allow remediation measures to be put in place. This is likely to result in a delay in graduation

- dismissal from the course – this is the most extreme sanction and is used when a student’s behaviour is fundamentally incompatible with their continuing on the programme or practising as a chiropractor in the future.

Further information about when each of these sanctions might be used and what would be reported to us as the regulator can be found in the *Student Fitness to Practise: Guidance for Chiropractic Education Providers* <https://www.gcc-uk.org/education/undergraduate-education/information-for-chiropractic-schools.aspx>

If there is a fitness-to-practise concern raised against you, it is important for you to cooperate with the process, to be honest and to use it as a way to learn and develop for the future. In the box below are some examples of cases heard by student fitness-to-practise panels and their outcomes. If your education provider imposes a sanction, you may need to agree to it being disclosed to other individuals or organisations when this is required for patient safety.

Examples of cases heard by student fitness–to-practise panels and their outcomes

- 1 A 2nd year student was accused by fellow students of bullying and sexual harassment, and of describing & showing photographs of how they had abused their partner physically and sexually. This student was immediately suspended pending an investigation, and after a formal student fitness-to-practise panel hearing was removed from the programme. The GCC was informed.
- 2 A 3rd year student told the senior management team that they had been found guilty of an offence related to distributing drugs. Their case was immediately referred to the student fitness-to-practise panel, which heard the case and decided that the student should be expelled from the course. The student appealed against the decision but the appeal panel upheld the student fitness–to-practise panel’s decision and so the student left the programme. The GCC was informed.
- 3 A final-year student was suspended because they reported for clinic duty smelling of alcohol and looking dishevelled. The student was referred to a student fitness-to-practise panel. During the hearing, the panel heard about the personal difficulties that the student had been trying to deal with outside of the college. There was evidence that since being suspended, the student had received counselling, and had undertaken cognitive behavioural therapy

- to relieve their dependency on alcohol and was making good progress. The student was allowed to return to clinic under close supervision, successfully completed their programme of studies and is now practising as a chiropractor.
- 4 A final-year student informed the college that they had been convicted of a drink-driving offence. This was immediately referred to the student fitness-to-practise panel. The case was heard and the student was allowed to continue on the programme following discussions with members of the senior management team about professional life and personal life issues.

If I am subject to student fitness to practise proceedings, does it mean I won't be able to practise as a chiropractor?

The fact that you have been before a student fitness to panel does not mean you will be unable to register with us. Generally the only instance when this will occur is if you have been dismissed from the course, and then you will not have graduated with a recognised qualification.

We will ask you if you have received any sanctions related to your fitness to practise as a student, and we would expect you to be honest with us. A sanction as a student does not stop you from registering. We are interested in knowing that you are honest and trustworthy, that you can recognise that you made a mistake and that you have learned from it. We would have greater concerns if you denied it or pretended it had not happened.

What do I have to do to register once I am qualified?

When you first apply to register with us, you must satisfy the Registrar that you have a chiropractic degree recognised by us as the regulator.

You will also need to provide us with a number of other pieces of information and it is your responsibility to ensure that what you provide is true and the evidence you submit is genuine, whether you submit it yourself or through a third party.

You must also:

- declare if you have been subject to any sanctions over your fitness to practise while a chiropractic student
- provide an up-to-date character reference – this must be written, dated and signed by someone of professional standing, acceptable to the Registrar, who has known you for four or more years, and is not a patient, relative or employee. For new graduates, it is expected that this character reference will come from a senior manager in the chiropractic education institution
- declare all criminal charges or convictions (except speeding offences), no matter when or where the offences were committed (registration is exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act)
- confirm you are in good health – currently this means that you need to provide a medical report from your GP
- give details of registration with other regulatory bodies or associations in the UK or elsewhere, and about any disciplinary action taken against you by such a body
- give information about any allegations of professional negligence considered by a civil court
- provide proof of professional indemnity insurance
- provide a birth certificate and proof of any change of name since then (for example, a marriage certificate).

The application form includes a declaration that you must sign to confirm you have answered the different sections correctly. If we later find out that you have not been truthful with your application, then the GCC Council may instruct the Registrar to remove your name from the Register.

The Registrar has a duty to ensure that all applicants for registration are fit to practise in line with the requirements of the GCC's *Code*. If necessary, the Registrar may ask for more evidence about your health or character to make sure that you meet the standard.

As your future regulator, we very much welcome any comments, concerns or queries that you may have about working as a chiropractor in the UK. You can contact us at any time by emailing us at education@gcc-uk.org

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