

# Standards of Ethics, Conduct and Performance

Approved by Council December 2013

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# Introduction

The Association for Nutrition (AfN) defines and advances standards of evidence-based practice across the field of nutrition and at all levels within the workforce. As an essential element of our work to protect and benefit the public, AfN governs the UK Voluntary Register of Nutritionists (UKVRN) and champions UKVRN registrants, whose entry onto the Register is an assurance that they meet rigorous standards of competence and professionalism. All UKVRN registrants (Registered Nutritionists (RNutr), Registered Associate Nutritionists (ANutr)) agree to adhere to the AfN Standards of Ethics, Conduct and Performance described in this document.

Nutrition is an extensive profession with diverse specialisms, practised in a wide range of settings. AfN Standards of Ethics, Conduct and Performance apply across the field and are intended to guide UKVRN registrants in their behaviour and work related decisions, to ensure they practise safely, effectively and appropriately. If concerns are raised about a UKVRN registrant, we will consider these standards when deciding whether or not to take action and failure to comply could put that individual's registration at risk.

AfN reviews its standards regularly to ensure their relevance to UKVRN registrants and the public, within the context of rapid change in policies and practices across nutrition. The AfN Standards of Ethics, Conduct and Performance will be reviewed in 2018 or before, as required to address stakeholder feedback, fitness to practise issues or best practice guidance issued by the Professional Standards Authority.

## Purpose of the Standards

AfN Standards of Ethics, Conduct and Performance describes expectations for behaviour of UKVRN registrants and consists of fifteen Standards with accompanying guidance. The guidance is intended to help UKVRN registrants understand and meet the Standards.

AfN Standards of Ethics, Conduct and Performance build on the Core Competency requirements all registrants must meet in order to remain on the Register.

UKVRN registrants work in many different environments, in the UK and overseas, so we have designed the Standards to apply to a variety of settings and encompass the breadth of professional activity undertaken by registrants.

These Standards apply to all UKVRN registrants regardless of field of activity, contracts of employment or membership of other professional organisations. It applies to UKVRN registrants wherever in the world they work and reside.

Upon registration all UKVRN registrants currently make several declarations regarding their professional practice, including:

*I undertake to uphold the AfN Standards of Ethics, Conduct and Performance. (previous version Code of Ethics and Statement of Professional Conduct)*

It is therefore important that all UKVRN registrants read and understand this document.

If we are notified of concerns about a registrant's behaviour, conduct, competence or health we will use the Standards and the Core Competencies to determine whether he/she remains fit to practise. UKVRN registrants are professionals, able to make informed choices and decisions relating to their work and behaviour, therefore AfN standards are not rules but guidelines. If the registrant can demonstrate that a decision made was based on sound judgements and in the best interests of the client, it is unlikely that he/she will fail to meet our Standards.

Registrants practising outside the United Kingdom may be required to be a member of, or registered by, that country's professional or regulatory body for nutritionists. If this is the case they must comply with the rules of conduct published by the local professional or regulatory body.

## Changes to the Standards

The UKVRN Code of Ethics and Statement of Professional Conduct were introduced soon after the Association for Nutrition was set up. The Standards were reviewed following the introduction, in July 2012, of our Core Competency Requirements for registration, so that they remain relevant to the profession and the public and take into account changing practices across the field of nutrition.

These Standards were developed in consultation with AfN trustees, UKVRN registrants and the public and agreed by AfN Council in December 2013, effective from 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013. We will periodically review our Standards, normally every five years. The next review will take place no later than 2018/9. Minor amendments were made in November 2016 to update the title of ANutrs to Registered Associate Nutritionists.

# Statements of Competence

AfN requirements for registration are set out in our Competency Requirements for Registered Associate Nutritionist (ANutr) Registration and Competency Requirements for Registered Nutritionist (RNutr) Registration. UKVRN registrants can demonstrate knowledge and understanding (All UKVRN registrants) and practical experience (Registered Nutritionists only) of the following nutrition concepts:

**Science** – Knowledge and understanding of the scientific basis of nutrition. Understanding nutritional requirements from the molecular through to the population level – for either human or animal systems.

**Food Chain** – Knowledge and understanding of the food chain and its impact on food choice. Integrating the food supply with dietary intake.

**Social/Behaviour** – Knowledge and understanding of food in a social or behavioural context, at all stages of the life course.

**Health/Wellbeing** – Understanding how to apply the scientific principles of nutrition for the promotion of health and wellbeing of individuals, groups and populations, recognising benefits and risks.

**Professional Conduct** – Understanding of Professional Conduct and the Association for Nutrition's Code of Ethics with evidence of good character.

# Standard of Ethics, Conduct and Performance

**A UKVRN registrant (Registered Nutritionist or Registered Associate Nutritionist) will:**

1. Act in the best interests of clients.
2. Maintain high standards of scientific integrity in their nutrition career.
3. Work within their scope of practice.
4. Keep up to date with developments in their field of work.
5. Maintain high standards of conduct and behaviour in all areas of life.
6. Maintain client confidentiality.
7. Where appropriate, maintain accurate client records including evidence of having gained informed consent.
8. Be objective, fair, balanced and proportionate in professional statements or recommendations made.
9. Avoid misleading advertising.
10. Communicate effectively with clients and colleagues.
11. Supervise colleagues or students responsibly.
12. Raise genuine concerns about other professionals.
13. Comply with relevant legislation.
14. Hold appropriate indemnity provision.
15. Comply with research ethics guidance.

# Guidance

## 1. Act in the best interests of clients

1.1 UKVRN registrants are responsible for ensuring they use their knowledge and skills to promote the health and wellbeing of humans and, where appropriate, animals, in a safe, effective and professional manner. UKVRN registrants are expected to use their professional judgement to balance the interests of their clients with the interests of the wider public where possible and appropriate.

1.2 UKVRN registrants must not, by act or omission, cause anything to be done which could endanger or adversely affect the health and safety of individuals, groups of clients, communities or the wider population. This includes the actions of others.

1.3 UKVRN registrants must respect the rights of individuals and should not seek to exploit or abuse their relationship with either clients or colleagues. Personal views on gender, age, colour, race, disability, sexuality, lifestyle, culture, political or religious views, social or economic status should not affect the respect and service provided to clients or colleagues.

1.4 When providing a service, UKVRN registrants must ensure that their clients understand the implications of limited compliance with advice or treatment and should only provide a service if it is appropriate to do so.

## 2. Maintain high standards of scientific integrity in their nutrition career

2.1 UKVRN registrants will continue to apply the scientific principles which they have learned in their education and continuing professional development, as set out within the core competency requirements for registration.

2.2 UKVRN registrants must demonstrate objectivity and integrity in their work when acquiring, reporting, discussing, collating, disseminating or interpreting research findings. This objectivity and integrity, alongside an understanding of knowledge gaps and uncertainty, extends to the use of research in formulating nutrition advice and public or economic policy.

2.3 UKVRN registrants are expected to demonstrate that these principles are a foundation, which inform their education, teaching, communications and professional practice.

## 3. Work within their scope of practice

3.1 UKVRN registrants are expected to know the limits of their skills and knowledge. They should refrain from undertaking work in which they are not trained and competent. UKVRN registrants must ensure that delegated work is appropriate before agreeing to take on that work. Similarly UKVRN registrants must not delegate tasks to individuals who are not competent to undertake what is asked of them, unless close supervision is provided.

3.2 Where possible, UKVRN registrants should seek to fill their knowledge gaps (see standard 4).

3.3 UKVRN registrants must refer clients to a more suitably trained person rather than undertake work which could cause harm or is not covered by their insurance. From time to time a client may request a second opinion and ask to be referred. When this happens, UKVRN registrants should comply with their request promptly.

3.4 Registrants affected by a medical condition which could impair performance and judgement should behave responsibly by limiting or ceasing practice as appropriate.

#### **4. Keep up to date with developments in their field of work**

4.1 All UKVRN registrants should undertake CPD in order to remain fit to practise. Registered Associate Nutritionists will begin to develop their portfolio by undertaking CPD as part of their preparation for transfer to Registered Nutritionist status.

4.2 We accept a wide range of CPD, delivered in many forms: engagement in formal events such as active attendance at conferences, workshops, lectures or more informal activities including reading relevant papers and journals, blogs, and participating in webinars. Online learning is acceptable. Engagement with peers through an AfN regional network is also encouraged.

4.3 It is advised that most of the CPD undertaken relates to the field of practice although UKVRN registrants must remain capable of meeting all the standards of competence.

4.4 Work which is new and/or at the cutting edge of nutrition is not discouraged but should be based upon sound hypotheses and consistency with existing biological and medical knowledge.

#### **5. Maintain high standards of conduct and behaviour in all areas of life**

5.1 All UKVRN registrants should maintain a professional approach and seek to avoid bringing the profession into disrepute or undermining public confidence in the nutrition profession. At all times registrants are expected to work with integrity and probity.

5.2 All registrants have a duty to bring to our attention any of the following:

- Convictions or cautions which he/she receives.
- Disciplinary proceedings by a regulatory or other professional body.
- Issues relating to his/her good health and good character.

5.3 Employers who have concerns over a registrant's competence are encouraged to use local procedures to resolve issues which affect health, conduct or performance and notify the outcome to AfN. A referral to AfN should only occur when other routes fail, the matter raises serious concerns or when a registrant leaves their post before the matter can be concluded.

5.4 UKVRN registrants who work as sole practitioners or run their own company will be expected to have their own complaints policy which is made available to all clients at the outset or is clearly available on their website. UKVRN registrants who work for companies and organisations must be familiar with the companies' complaints procedure.

5.5 All UKVRN registrants are expected to respond to complaints from clients in a timely and appropriate manner, following AfN guidance on handling complaints. In the event that a matter is brought to the attention of AfN, a registrant's co-operation is expected in any investigation.



## **6. Maintain client confidentiality**

6.1 UKVRN registrants must respect the confidentiality of their clients and any information they hold about them. UKVRN registrants should not disclose personal data without written consent from the client and should ensure that information is only used for the explicit purpose for which it has been given. Personal data includes medical conditions, treatment provided, financial data and contracts entered into. We expect UKVRN registrants to comply with both the spirit and the letter of the Data Protection Act.

6.2 If UKVRN registrants are unsure they should seek advice from the Data Information Officer (or equivalent) at their workplace or the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

## **7. Where appropriate, maintain accurate client records including evidence of having gained informed consent**

7.1 Maintaining records of services and care provided is essential to a registrant's professionalism. Records and notes should always be compiled as soon as possible to ensure they form an accurate account of the event. All records should be clearly labelled and dated. Any paper-based records should be easy to read.

7.2 Sound data security must be employed for electronic and paper records, in addition to all other communications, whether electronic or verbal.

7.3 Advice can be sought from the Information Commissioners Office (ICO). Any UKVRN registrant who is a sole trader should identify whether he/she is required to be registered with the ICO as a data controller.

7.4 Records should be maintained for all activities in the course of your professional work. The disposal of such records should be in an appropriate and secure manner.

7.5 When providing a service direct to a client, UKVRN registrants should ensure that the client understands what service or advice is being offered and obtain written consent. UKVRN registrants should ensure clients understand the implications of limited compliance with any advice or treatment given.

## **8. Be objective, fair, balanced and proportionate in professional statements or recommendations made**

8.1 UKVRN registrants must not make unwarranted comment on the character, competence or integrity of other members of the profession.

8.2 UKVRN registrants are expected to respect and reflect the balance of the scientific evidence which underpins their research, practice, advice, teaching and communications to others. Any statements which are made must show objectivity in assessing evidence and not mislead others as to the availability of evidence by omission, exaggeration or ignorance.

## **9. Avoid misleading advertising**

9.1 UKVRN registrants should not make claims which are false and for which there is no evidence. UKVRN registrants should not make claims about their skills, qualifications, knowledge or experience which cannot be proven. UKVRN registrants should not claim to hold a specialism in nutrition which is not listed on the UKVRN.

9.2 UKVRN registrants who are involved in the promotion or advertising of products or services must ensure that scientific knowledge, professional skills and experience are used in an accurate and responsible manner. They should not recommend a particular product without making clear that alternative products may be available.

9.3 UKVRN registrants are expected to use their title (Registered Nutritionist or Registered Associate Nutritionist) in their advertising and should make their registration number available upon request, to anyone who wishes to check their current registration status against the UKVRN. UKVRN registrants should use the letters ANutr, RNutr or RNutr FafN on all professional correspondence. Registrants who hold a specialism should identify this in brackets following their RNutr letters e.g. RNutr (Animal).

9.4 Use of the AfN logo or mark should not be used without explicit consent of AfN.

## **10. Communicate effectively with clients and colleagues**

10.1 Communications should be clear and delivered in an appropriate manner. UKVRN registrants must make every effort to co-operate with clients, colleagues and other registrants where possible. If this is not possible this must be explained clearly and other options offered.

10.2 Registrants should be willing to share their knowledge and expertise with fellow registrants and students.

## **11. Supervise colleagues or students responsibly**

11.1 UKVRN registrants who are responsible for the supervision of others, whether students or colleagues, should provide appropriate support, ensuring instructions are given in a clear manner and that their instructions have been understood. Tasks should not be delegated if they are outside the scope of competency of the colleague or student and pressure should not be placed on any individual to undertake tasks which they do not feel competent to undertake.

11.2 Registered Nutritionists should encourage and support Registered Associate Nutritionist applications for transfer to RNutr registration and provide guidance and mentoring to those who may not be fully ready for category transfer.

## **12. Raise genuine concerns about other professionals**

12.1 Any UKVRN registrants should take action if he/she is aware of competence, conduct or health issues of another registrant, which could affect their fitness to practise. This may initially be through an informal conversation bringing the concerns and these Standards to their attention. If the matter is unresolved it should be raised more formally with the registrant's line manager. Referral to AfN may be appropriate where a solution cannot be obtained locally. Depending on the situation, it may be appropriate to refer the matter to the Police or other public body for investigation.

### **13. Comply with relevant legislation**

13.1 UKVRN registrants are expected to comply with all relevant legislation which impacts on their working practice. This includes, but is not restricted to:

- Equality Act 2010
- Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations amended May 2011
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Codex Alimentarius, established 1963

### **14. Hold appropriate Indemnity Provision**

14.1 UKVRN registrants are expected to have appropriate indemnity provision in place if they work directly with individual members of the public. It is up to the registrant to decide the level and type of cover they require, however they must be able to access legal advice if necessary and the premium should be sufficient to cover any compensation claims made. We do not expect UKVRN registrants to work on an individual basis without insurance/indemnity cover unless they have their own personal financial means to pay any compensation claims made.

### **15. Comply with research ethics guidance**

15.1 There are fundamental ethical principles involved in the undertaking of scientific research. UKVRN registrants are expected to avoid scientific misconduct by ensuring that they do not commit fraud, falsify data or plagiarise in the production of papers and evidence. The data which is produced must be trustworthy.

15.2 UKVRN registrants should ensure all individuals participating in a project they are conducting are aware of its nature and have provided informed consent.

15.3 UKVRN registrants should follow all AfN principles in order to avoid scientific misconduct. Other UK bodies have produced extensive guidelines for those undertaking research, which we recommend where relevant to those working within the nutrition industry:

15.4 The UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) Code of Practice for Research provides best practice guidance for those undertaking research. This covers general guidance, leadership and supervision, training and mentoring, research design, collaborative working, conflicts of interest, research involving animals and humans, human materials, and personal data, health and safety, intellectual property, finance, collection and retention of data, monitoring and audit for review, publication and authorship and misconduct in research. It is a live document, so we recommend that registrants visit the website for the latest guidance – [www.ukrio.org](http://www.ukrio.org)

15.5 UKVRN registrants working in medical research should be aware of further guidance by the General Medical Council (Good Practice in Research and Consent to Research) and the Medical Research Council (Ethics and Research Guidance).

# Development of this document

AfN has produced this document drawing on the existing AfN Code of Ethics and Statement of Professional Conduct, taking into account good practice guidance from the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) and Professional Associations Regulatory Network (PARN). This guidance has been benchmarked against standards guidance used by UK statutory healthcare regulators and those accredited with the PSA as an Accredited Voluntary Register.

## Glossary of terms

### **Acting in the best interests of clients**

The best course of action for a client, not the registrant or their employer.

### **AfN**

Association for Nutrition

### **Client confidentiality**

Personal information about clients will not be revealed by registrants to a third party without the consent of the client unless a clear legal reason is presented.

### **Clients**

Individuals, group of individuals or population groups (including animals and/or those who represent their interests) for whom the registrant holds responsibility as a consequence of his/her professional service or advice.

### **Communicating effectively**

Conveying relevant information, at an appropriate time and in a way which suits the audience.

### **Conduct and behaviour**

Conduct is the way in which a registrant acts.

Behaviour is the way in which a registrant responds to another individual, group or a situation.

### **Guidance**

Additional detail on how to apply the standards on a daily basis/in practice.

### **Informed consent**

Permission from a client (including research participants) who is informed of and understands all the facts, risks and limitations when agreeing to participate in activities.

### **Keeping up to date**

Maintaining and extending knowledge and skills through a combination of learning activities known as Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

### **Misleading advertising**

Advertising which is dishonest or inaccurate.

**Professional statements and recommendations**

Comments about other professionals or advice provided.

**Scientific integrity**

Evidence-based information and guidance developed by registrants without pressure from outside bodies such as government or commercial industries to change and/or hide research findings.

**Scope of practice**

Area of nutrition in which a registrant is trained and competent to work.

**Standards**

The ethical principles by which all UKVRN registrants should aim to abide.

**Supervision**

Overseeing the work or tasks of another individual(s).

**UKVRN**

United Kingdom Voluntary Register of Nutritionists

**UKRVN Registrants**

Registered Associate Nutritionist (ANutr), Registered Nutritionist (RNutr) and Registered Nutritionist Fellow of Association for Nutrition (RNutr FAFN).

## Relevant links

<b>Medical Research Council</b>	<a href="http://www.mrc.ac.uk">www.mrc.ac.uk</a>
<b>General Medical Council</b>	<a href="http://www.gmc-uk.org">www.gmc-uk.org</a>
<b>Health Care Professions Council</b>	<a href="http://www.hcpc-uk.org">www.hcpc-uk.org</a>
<b>UK Research Integrity Office</b>	<a href="http://www.ukrio.org">www.ukrio.org</a>
<b>ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service)</b>	<a href="http://www.acas.org.uk">www.acas.org.uk</a>
<b>Health and Safety Executive</b>	<a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk">www.hse.gov.uk</a>
<b>Information Commissioners Office</b>	<a href="http://www.ico.org.uk">www.ico.org.uk</a>