About the Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI)

- The VCI is the independent regulator of the veterinary professions in Ireland acting in the interests of animal health and welfare and public health.

- It regulates and inspects the practice of veterinary medicine, veterinary nursing and veterinary premises in the state in the public interest. It also regulates programmes of education of veterinary medicine and veterinary nursing.

- As of 7th December 2021, there are:
  - 3,206 registered veterinary practitioners
  - 1,182 registered veterinary nurses
  - 757 registered veterinary premises
Our Vision

Our vision is to be a trusted and effective regulator of the veterinary professions.

In shaping this vision and our priorities for the coming years, we acknowledge the changing and challenging environment for the veterinary professions. We have focused on prioritising the areas we feel require attention in the short to medium term.

We will challenge ourselves, learn from what works elsewhere and increase our engagement with stakeholders and registrants, to give us the best possible insight into how well we are achieving our goals.

We have consulted widely with stakeholders and deliberated at length in arriving at the stated objectives for the coming years.

Trusted & Effective Veterinary Regulation

Our Mission

Our mission is to ensure the standards of education and practice among the veterinary professions, enhances animal health and welfare, and benefits society.

How veterinary regulation makes a difference:

- Safeguarding the register of veterinary practitioners and nurses
- Ensuring high standards of practice through education programme accreditation and continuing professional development
- Promoting high professional and ethical standards through the Code of Professional Conduct
- Promoting standards through the inspection and certification of veterinary premises and the service they provide
- Taking disciplinary action in cases of professional misconduct
### Our Strategic Objectives

1. Lead animal health and welfare in line with *One Health, One Welfare initiatives*
2. Maintain confidence of the public and veterinary professions in the Veterinary Council of Ireland processes
3. Enable good professional practice and professionalism through education
4. Support the health and wellbeing of registrants
5. Support and develop the role of the veterinary nurse
6. Enhance, influence and inform policy through insightful research and meaningful engagement
Background – the Challenge

- Veterinary Medicine and Veterinary Nursing are high pressure professions.

- The veterinary professions are faced with a unique set of challenges including: unpredictable working hours, complex cases, demanding owners and heavy workloads.

- Clinical practice is stimulating, rewarding and at times challenging.

- The outcomes and the environments veterinary professionals work in can be unpredictable.

- Veterinary professionals need to be in the right frame of mind to make good clinical decisions and maintain positive relationships with colleagues and clients.
What we did

- In keeping with the VCI’s strategic objective to ‘support the health and wellbeing of its Registrants’, it commissioned an updated SAFEVET SMART book as a tool to assist and support its Registrants in achieving this goal.

- The VCI commissioned Dr Margaret O’ Rourke, a Consultant forensic Clinical Psychologist and Director of Behavioural Science at School of Medicine in University College Cork and author of SAFEMED (Programme designed for Human Medicine Students/Doctors) Programme to develop a practical mental health and wellbeing resource to assist all veterinary professionals in practice.
About SAFEVET SMART

SAFEVET SMART aims to:

- help veterinary professionals reduce stress, improve coping strategies and build resilience through evidence-based strategies and tools

- Focuses on a comprehensive fitness and whole health approach through evidence-based stress management and resilience techniques

- Provides practical, easy to use, proven stress management techniques organises around a ‘Five Pillars of Health Framework’
Five Pillars for Whole Health: Five drivers of well-being and resilience

- SAFEVET SMART uses this approach to help design a framework and plan for success and good health.

- The book is divided into five key sections based on Pillars of Whole Health, covering steps and skills to build positive, balanced, resilient and successful veterinary professionals

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SAFEVET SMART: Five Systems of Whole Health Approach

SAFEVET SMART based on a Whole Health Approach
Whole health and well-being is the result of what we put into and how needs are balanced in all Five Systems.

All areas of our lives are connected:
i.e. what we do in one area of our life affects the way we feel in another area each system (body, mind, behaviour, context, spirit) is independent and inter-dependent.

The Five Systems Five Pillars for whole health are:

- Context
- Physical Health
- Your Body
- Your Mind
- Your Spirit
- Genetics
- Nutrition
- Finances
- Life Roles
- Friends
- Work
- Living Accommodation
- Leisure
- Family
- Social Relationships

The Five Systems Five Pillars for whole health are:

- Context
- Finances
- Life Roles
- Friends
- Work
- Living Accommodation
- Leisure
- Family
- Social Relationships
Aims of SAFEVET SMART

- **SAFEVET SMART** is an evidence-based health and wellbeing programme intended to equip all members of the veterinary professions with the necessary skills to manage stress and adverse events, prevent burnout and build resilience.

- All veterinary professions must learn to manage themselves and their health, to ensure they are in a position to provide adequate care and treatment to others.

- Resilience is an essential skill required to manage the challenging roles of the vet and veterinary nurse along with any challenges faced throughout their professional and personal lives.

- To increase awareness of the supports available to veterinary professionals, the VCI published a list of mental health & wellbeing support services available to veterinary professionals in the SAFEVET Handbook. A list of these supports can also be found on the VCI website. An overview of some of these resources are included overleaf for ease of reference.
Veterinary Mental Health & Wellbeing supports: An overview

Veterinary Supports

Irish Veterinary Benevolent Fund (IVBF)
The IVBF provides financial and other supports to veterinary professionals and their families on a strictly confidential basis. The IVBF currently provides a 24/7 support line, regular monthly income supplements, one off payments for specific purposes and short-term assistance with mortgage repayments.

+ 353 1 716 6099 – 24/7 support line (1800 995 955)
www.ivbf.ie

The Veterinary Assistance Programme (VetAP)
The Irish Veterinary Assistance Programme is a confidential support service with the purpose of promoting positive mental health, providing support at times of difficulty and providing crisis response during times of extreme stress. Support is free to all Veterinary professionals and their dependents (over 16 years of age). The Programme is funded by the IVBF with support from the Veterinary Council, Veterinary Ireland, Veterinary Officers Association, and the Irish Veterinary Nursing Association, and delivered by VHI Corporate Solutions. The Programme is part funded by the National Organisation for Suicide Prevention (NOSP).

+ 353 1800 995 955
www.ivbf.ie/vap

VetLife
The Irish Veterinary Benevolent Fund (IVBF) in association with VetLife have a dedicated freephone number available for vets and veterinary nurses to ring 24 hours a day, 7 days a week if they are emotionally or mentally distressed and need immediate help. The number will be answered by VetLife in the UK and will be diverted confidentially to vet and vet nurse volunteers trained to help their colleagues. VetLife is backed by a health support service called March on Stress. This service is being sponsored and paid for by the Irish Veterinary Benevolent Fund and the Veterinary Council of Ireland.

VetSupport Ireland
Vet Support Ireland is a voluntary organisation that provides a confidential listening and support service for all members of the veterinary professions in Ireland including email and colleague manned support services.

info@vetsupportnorthernireland.co.uk
www.vetsupportni.co.uk/roi/
How we communicated our message

- **Launch of SAFEVET SMART**
  On 30th November 2020, the VCI launched the SAFEVET SMART Handbook in Merrion Square in Dublin. The colourful backdrop was chosen to tie in with the theme of the Handbook. A press release issued to all agri-media outlets.

- **Communication with Registrants and course providers**
  A copy of the SAFEVET SMART Handbook was sent to:
  - All vets and veterinary nurses on the VCI Register
  - 5 educational course providers of veterinary nursing
  - UCD School of Veterinary Medicine
  - Booklet was published on VCI website
Outcome and Results

Feedback from the veterinary professions:
✓ The response from the professions has been overwhelmingly positive with many commenting on the easy to follow, practical nature of the Handbook and how they have applied it in their daily practice

Relevance to programmes of veterinary medicine:
✓ Awareness of the SAFEVET SMART Handbook is promoted on the UCD School of Veterinary Medicine and Nursing Programme Module on ‘Professionalism’ in a lecture given annually by VCI Registrar, Niamh Muldoon.
✓ Raises awareness to all veterinary students of the challenges they will face and the tools/supports at their disposal

Nationwide media coverage:
✓ The release was picked up by 7 media outlets including 4 regional news outlets.
✓ The VCI Registrar, Niamh Muldoon was invited to appear on Radio to discuss the SAFEVET SMART publication and its relevance to the veterinary professions.
✓ Proposals for other more targeted measures intended – Health Survey carried by in Q2 in partnership with National Suicide Research Foundation and National Office of Suicide Prevention

Next:
✓ Q4 2021: VCI is developing a Health & Wellbeing webinar carrying CPD Credits for issue to all VCI Registrants – further normalising the topic of mental health & wellbeing to raise awareness of supports available.
How to access a copy of SAFEVET SMART

To download a copy of the SAFEVET SMART Handbook, please visit:

http://vci.ie/getmedia/a695b042-d26b-4232-8324-9b08f7f31cba/SAFEVET-SMART-(2)_5.pdf