

RCVS Submissions on Mr Lonsdale's allegations of apparent bias on the part of the Challenge Committee

1. The RCVS's position is that a fair minded observer, having considered the facts, would not conclude that there is a real possibility that the Challenge Committee is biased.
2. As the legal assessor has observed, the role of the Challenge Committee is to decide whether or not the 2017 Council Election is to be declared invalid due to a breach of the RCVS's Election Scheme ("the Scheme"). The Challenge Committee is not being asked to decide on the merits of Mr Lonsdale's view that pet food manufacturers are selling food that is harmful to animal health in collusion with the veterinary profession.
3. Further, Mr Lonsdale objects to an extremely wide pool of persons which is indicative of an unreasonable and non-fair minded approach to the question of apparent bias. Mr Lonsdale objects to any member of a British veterinary school, the RCVS, the British Veterinary Association and the British Small Animal Veterinary Association sitting on the Challenge Committee by reason of apparent bias (emphasis added, see Mr Lonsdale's letter of 25 July 2017). Mr Lonsdale's objection to any member of the RCVS sitting on the Challenge Committee presents an immediate problem because the Election Scheme provides at rule 34(3) that the Challenge Committee shall "consist of three members of the Council who are not elected members". There is no discretion under the Scheme to appoint a Challenge Committee from persons who are not members of the RCVS's Council. In any event, the pool of unelected members of the Council is limited and the RCVS agrees with the legal assessor that Mr Lonsdale is likely to object to anyone who is associated with a veterinary school or the veterinary profession generally.
4. The RCVS submits that there is no real possibility of bias on the part of any of the members of the Challenge Committee

Professor Hammond

5. Professor Hammond is Head of the Bristol Veterinary School (BVS). Whilst BVS has received some funding from pet food manufacturers for research, that funding is a miniscule proportion of the total income of BVS (0.01% to 0.14%). Further, Professor Hammond has

not personally or directly benefitted from those funds although he has approved the funding and research conducted pursuant to those funds as Head of the School.

6. AS CEO for Langford Pets (a wholly owned subsidiary of the University) he approves the sale of prescription pet food for animals under their care. However, in so doing he is behaving in the same way as a CEO of any commercial veterinary practice that sells prescription pet food for animals receiving treatment.
7. In the circumstances, a fair minded observer would conclude that his connection with the pet food industry is remote and indirect. There is no real possibility of his judgment being distorted or influenced by an interest in or links with the pet food industry. There is no objective basis for objecting to his membership of the Committee.

Professor Wood

8. Professor Wood is a head of department at Cambridge Veterinary School (CVS). Professor Wood has stated that CVS receives a grant from Royal Canin (a pet food manufacturer) which funds one postgraduate training position (SCTS in Small Animal Medicine). The grant is received via the Veterinary School Trust (VST), which is a charity. It appears that CVS may not deal directly with Royal Canin in respect of this grant given that the grant is paid through the VST. Royal Canin has a student contact and sponsors various student evening events (which appear to include some nutrition training), although these are not organised by CVS directly but by the student society. The Senior Lecturer in Animal Medicine is no longer involved with this initiative.
9. It is plain that the value of the grant made through VST to CVS is an extremely small proportion of CVS's overall funding (less than 1%). It amounts to £74,070 over 3 years. Professor Wood's role was to sign the legal agreement which had been drawn up by others in relation to the funding of the postgraduate training position but he had no other involvement in the negotiations or in the research being conducted. The level of funding (by comparison to CVS's total income) and Professor Wood's arms-length involvement does not give rise to a real possibility of him being biased in favour of the pet food industry.
10. Another pet food manufacturer, Eukanuba, provides some discounted pet food to CVS. Professor Wood clarified that students do not benefit from the food but staff purchase it and it is otherwise available to CVS. He estimates that the total benefit from discounted food

in the last year was £8,500 and 15% of that was purchased by individual members of staff. (Although in some instances the food is no cheaper or even more expensive than the market price). Although an overall income figure has not been given, the financial benefit to CVS from the discounted dog food must represent a tiny proportion of CVS's overall revenue.

11. In the circumstances, there is no real possibility of Professor Wood being influenced by reason of a connection with or interest in the pet food industry or an interest in securing funding from the pet food industry. It would be "unduly sensitive or suspicious" to suggest an appearance of bias.

Ms Elaine Ancaster

12. Ms Ancaster is a retired Vice-principal of the Royal Veterinary College (RVC). She says that her role at the RVS placed her at some distance from the acquisition and use of funds, sale of pet food and other forms of support from pet food companies.
13. Further, she is not a qualified vet and is one of the few lay members of the RCVS Council.
14. In the circumstances, there is no objective basis for suggesting that a fair minded observer would conclude there is a real possibility of bias on her part.

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