

Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
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Chloe Newbold,
Clerk to the Election Challenge Committee

12 September 2017

Letter of advice

Re: Lonsdale v RCVS – Challenge to the validity of the 2017 Council Election (“the Election”)

This letter is further to my letter of advice dated 21 August 2017, which sets out the background to this matter.

As advised, the two letters setting out the details of Mr Lonsdale’s challenge to the validity of the Election were sent to the members of the Committee, so that they could consider whether they were aware of any matters of potential conflict in relation to their sitting to decide Mr Lonsdale’s challenge.

The members of the Committee responded as follows, disclosing matters that might give rise to a potential conflict.

Professor Hammond (Bristol Veterinary School)

“Bristol Veterinary School has previously received funding for research from pet food manufacturers as either the parent company or their subsidiary. Although I have not personally received or directly benefited from those funds, as Head of School I am ultimately responsible for approving the application and receipt of those funds and the research conducted based on that funding.

Second, as CEO of Langford Vets (a wholly owned subsidiary of the University), I approve the sale of prescription pet foods for animals under our care. This is no different to any commercial practice.”

“In 2015 the School received £19,000 from Waltham to fund the research of an individual in our welfare group (a PST doctoral researcher) for a research project: the funding was labelled a ‘collaborative behaviour and welfare award’.

In 2012 the school received £1800 from Hills to fund food for freshers week.

In 2012 Hills donated €10,000 for contribution to a stipend for a postgraduate student.

In 2016/17 hills have donated £1100 for prizes to be presented on graduation day for high achieving students”

Professor James Wood (Cambridge Veterinary School)

Professor Wood made enquiries, and was provided with the following information:

“We do receive a grant from Royal Canin, albeit through the Veterinary School Trust, to fund our SCTS in Small Animal Medicine. In return, there is a small sum of money for research and travel, but they also gain access through the SCTS and [a Senior Lecturer in Small Animal Medicine] to our students for some nutrition teaching. They also support some of the Vet school student events.

Eukanuba also provide some discounted food to the Hospital, staff and students”

Professor Wood said that the Royal Canin grant amounts to £74,070 over 3 years.

Ms Elaine Acaster (Retired Vice-Principal of the Royal Veterinary College)

Ms Acaster is clear that she has no conflict. She said:

“In the light of Mr Lonsdale’s comments and those of Richard and James, I should clarify that my roles at RVC placed me at a distance from the acquisition and use of funds, sale of pet food and any other forms of support from Pet Food Companies. I did not have an academic appointment, nor am I Dr Acaster [as Mr Lonsdale described her].

I, therefore re-state that I believe I am not conflicted and am one of the small number of lay (non-veterinary qualified) members of the RCVS Council.”

Mr Lonsdale continues to object to all three members of the Committee sitting to hear his challenge.

I advise that more detailed information is required from Professor Hammond and Professor Wood, as follows.

Professor Hammond

- Please specify (approximately) what proportion of the overall funding of the School the funding in the relevant years represented on an annual basis.
- Please explain the extent of your personal involvement, if any, in procuring or approving the application and receipt of the relevant funding, and the research conducted on the basis of such funding.

Professor Wood

- Please explain in more detail how the Royal Canin grant is used or distributed. Where does the Veterinary School Trust fit in? What is the SCTS? How much is the sum of money for research and travel, and how does it work? Please explain how [?Royal Canin] gains access through SCTS and a Senior Lecturer to students for nutrition training. What is the value of that access? What is the value of the support for student events?
- What is the value of the discounted food benefit to the Hospital, staff and students?
- Specify (approximately) what proportion of the overall funding of the School or the department this funding represents or has represented on an annual basis?
- Please explain the extent to which you are or were personally involved, if at all, in procuring or approving the application and receipt of the relevant funding, and/or the research conducted based on that funding.

Once that information is received, and any further comments have been received from Mr Lonsdale, I will give further advice as to how the test of the "*fair-minded and informed observer*" is to be approached. It will then be for the Committee as a whole to decide, having taken advice, as to whether it is necessary for any member of the Committee to recuse themselves from sitting to hear Mr Lonsdale's challenge, applying the "*fair-minded and informed observer*" test.

Richard Price OBE QC

Legal Assessor