

Preparing for a Professional Requirements, Academic Misconduct or Misconduct Meeting

1. Background

You have been referred to one of these three procedures. As you will see from the attached diagram all of these procedures link together, that is because they are all essentially about the same thing: that the College is worried that you are not meeting the requirements of the RVC Charter.

There is more than one procedure because different problems require different forms of investigation, consideration and eventual decision about the student. You can imagine that if a student is alleged to have let off a fire extinguisher in Halls that requires a different approach to a research student who is alleged to have made up their research results.

Nevertheless, the advice for a student who finds themselves in such a situation is the same.

2. So you have received a letter or email requiring you to attend a meeting

2.1. *Don't Panic*

Only in the rarest of cases does College find it has a student who really should not continue with his/her degree studies. On the other hand, this is serious and you need to prepare well.

The Committee/Panel (called Committee from now on) you are about to meet is impartial. You will be treated fairly. The College is just as accountable for its actions as you are.

The Committee is very well aware that this is a difficult situation for any student to encounter and they try their best to enable you to state your case as best as you can.

2.2. *Prepare your approach*

We will deal with the practicalities later in this note. For now, re read the Charter and then stop and think. You might also need to read the RCVS Guide for Students, Research Integrity or Plagiarism depending on the nature of the issue.

What is the letter saying about you? Be really honest with yourself, what went wrong and how did it happen? Could you have done things in a better way? Or with hindsight should you have not done some things? How have *you* contributed to this situation?

It is best to be honest with yourself and with the College. Honesty is the foundation of good professional, academic and research practise; so it matters a lot in all of these procedures.

Being honest is more than telling the truth

Acting honestly means more than simply answering questions truthfully. It would be dishonest to allow a Committee (or yourself) to gain a false impression of a situation even if someone did not actually lie to do so. Do tell the 'whole truth' not a part of it so avoiding something difficult.

It is most important that you are honest at all times, both when preparing your written submission and when you are answering questions at the meeting itself. Honesty and trustworthiness are virtues that the panel will be looking for when they are considering your case.

This is all being said not because we naturally expect students to lie, but because we know that sometimes you need to have courage to admit mistakes; especially in this kind of a situation.

3. **Context to consider**

The Committee meeting is not a court of law, nor is it the hearing of a professional body such as the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). It is a College Committee, set up to consider the written evidence submitted and any information provided in answers to questions at the meeting.

The Committee will not have decided anything in advance. The material and answers you supply to them will be a strong voice and they will listen. The emphasis is on probing discussion with a view to making the best decision for you, the College and where relevant the profession.

The Committee has to make decisions about your future and to consider questions such as whether or not you are fit to practice, fit to study and whether or not there are any special measures needed to support and guide you.

The College is aware of its legal obligations and these are built into our practices.

You can now help them to give you the best decision (for you the College and the profession) and the best advice that will help you in the future.

4. **Practicalities you need to know about**

4.1. ***The Committee Secretary***

Every Committee has a Secretary, who organises the meeting, and who will supply you with the papers and notify you of the date, time and venue. The Secretary will be present throughout the meeting itself and will make a note of what is said, but is not a member of the Committee and plays no part in the decision-making. The Secretary is a key point of contact for you, and is the person to approach if you have any queries relating to the Committee.

4.2. ***The Procedure document is important***

One of the things the Secretary will send you is the written procedures that govern all matters relating to the Committee. It is important that you read and understand these regulations because they explain how the Committee meeting will be conducted and they list the possible outcomes. It can also be read on the web at www.rvc.ac.uk and this is a useful place as there are hover points with notes above those areas which might be difficult to understand.

4.3. ***The papers for the Committee meeting***

You will receive, in advance of the Committee meeting, a set of papers. (As PDF documents attached to an email to your RVC address). These papers will include the concerns and allegations that have been raised about you.

The Committee members will have received an identical set of papers to the ones sent to you a fundamental rule is that they must not be given anything that has not been supplied to you.

Make sure you read the papers carefully. You will be invited to write a response. You do not have to do this but it is usually helpful to everyone.

4.4. ***The Presenter in the Professional Requirements Procedure***

A member of staff will be appointed to be the Presenter; they will present the concerns that have been raised to the Committee.

5. **Your written submission**

The Secretary will invite you to prepare a written submission which must be received by the given deadline to enable it to be circulated to, and read by, the Committee. You are encouraged to use this opportunity to set out your full response to any allegations.

6. **Writing your submission**

6.1. ***Approach***

This is your important first response.

Knowing the context and having thought honestly about your part in these matters, you should start to write your submission.

6.2. ***What to include in your written submission***

You should not feel under pressure to accept any allegations which you feel are untrue or incorrect, but if you accept that the allegations are fair then it is helpful to acknowledge this in your written submission and explain what steps you have taken to improve or correct the position and what you will do in the future to prevent similar problems occurring.

The Committee needs to know in particular:

- whether or not you accept any allegations, criticisms or concerns;
- what explanations you have for your actions;
- how you plan to change your behaviour in the future (if you accept that change is needed);
- information about mitigating circumstances (events beyond your control, like a health problem, or financial or accommodation difficulties, or personal difficulties);
- favourable information such as previous good behaviour or evidence that your behaviour has improved;
- in cases of ill health, how you plan to manage your health problems in the future.

If a logical structure does not immediately present itself to you, then a chronological approach to events can often be helpful.

The Committee cannot take into account information it has not received; if you are unsure whether or not something is relevant, it is better to mention it. This is your opportunity to ensure that your case is properly considered and it would be unwise to omit information which could result in the Committee forming an impression which was not based on the whole truth.

6.3. ***Consider submitting additional evidence with your written submission***

If you have mitigating circumstances, it is important that you supply documentary evidence. For example, if you (or a relative) have been ill and obtained medical treatment, then make sure you obtain and supply a report from the doctor who has provided treatment.

The Committee wants to receive rounded information, so although they know of concerns about you, the Committee will also wish to learn of favourable information about you, such as positive reports from supervisors or testimonials from those who have taught you or employed you. So please feel free to include such material even if it has no apparent bearing on the case against you.

Testimonials should include the name, address and contact details of the author, should if possible be signed, and should explain how the author knows you. If the author of a testimonial knows why you have been referred to the Committee, then it is helpful if the person can explain this in his or her letter. Thus a testimonial might

start by saying, for example, "I am aware that John has been convicted of shoplifting twice, the first offence being in 2012 and the second in 2014. I am writing as his supervisor when he was attached to our unit from 6 January to 14 February 2013".

Volume of testimonials is not the key here. Provide a few to support your case and be evidence to counterbalance the concerns that brought you to the Committee. If there are many, the impact might well be lost.

6.4. *Unexpected new material may cause the Committee to have to adjourn the case*

It is most important to avoid submitting unexpected new material. If you know something is going to be later than the given deadline, then get in touch with the Secretary straightaway.

No one involved in the meeting should be taken by surprise by late information.

7. You may have to attend one or more Occupational Health appointments.

Health information can be vitally important to the meeting and you should respond to and attend such appointments promptly and be open and cooperative with all of the medical personnel that you encounter.

8. Help and support is available

Please do not try to go through this process entirely on your own – take advice

Preparing for and attending a Committee meeting is not something you should try to do on your own. Here is a list of possible sources of help and advice.

- The Advice Centre
- Your tutor, or other member of staff
- the Students' Union

Consent is needed for communication with your representative

If you cannot reasonably discuss your case with the Committee in person, and this would be a most unusual circumstance, then please make sure you advise the Secretary as soon as possible.

9. At the meeting

9.1. *Attendance is obligatory*

You must attend the Committee meeting. If you are too ill to attend, you will need to have supplied a medical certificate to the Committee Secretary. If you do not attend without a reasonable explanation, the Committee has the power to consider the case in your absence.

9.2. *Please do not come alone, but arrange for someone to accompany you*

The procedures will explain who is allowed to accompany you to the Committee meeting. You are encouraged to avoid coming alone, and to do your best to make sure you are accompanied; you cannot predict what will happen, and there are likely to be occasions when you would like to discuss things with someone. Make sure the Committee Secretary knows who will be accompanying you.

Students sometimes wonder who they should bring. You should bring the person who will give you good moral support and be understanding of your situation. It is not an adversarial legal process; it is a College process that observes the requirements of natural justice. The College allows a student to bring a legal

representative with them; however it is entirely the student's choice who to bring.

9.3. Do not arrive late

Arriving late is likely to displease the Committee and add even further to your level of anxiety. You need to leave sufficiently early to ensure that even if the traffic is bad or the trains are running late you will still arrive well on time.

9.4. Be prepared to stay longer than the time indicated on the agenda.

It is impossible to predict how long a meeting will take; the agenda is our best estimate.

9.5. Bring your copy of the papers

There is bound to be reference to the papers, so make sure you bring along your own copy of the papers.

9.6. If you need a break during the Committee meeting just ask

The Chair will try to ensure that there are regular breaks, but if for any reason you are finding it difficult please feel free to ask for a short break. If you become emotional do not be afraid to ask for some time to compose yourself. If you have a disability and need special arrangements please let the Committee Secretary know in advance of the meeting.

10. After the Meeting

The Chair of the Committee will have explained to you how and when you will find out their decision. This varies depending on practical matters, however you will always receive a formal 'outcome letter'. That letter will contain all of the advice that you need and your choices about next steps if you are not happy with the outcome.

And finally.....

Remember the College is in the business of trying to help as many of its students as possible to succeed and have high academic and professional standards by the time they graduate.

With thanks to Prof Tim David (Academic Lead for Health and Social Care Student Fitness to Practice, Faculty of Medical and Human Sciences, University of Manchester) who provided an example document which was of use in preparing this note

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