

COMPLAINTS AGAINST ECVN MEMBERS OR RESIDENTS

last update. 24/10/25

Conduct of ECVN members or residents that impacts upon the functions of the College should be addressed by the complaints procedures of the College as governed by the [Policies and Procedures of the EBVS](#).

Complaints about professional conduct should be referred to the national competent authority where that veterinarian is registered.

The scope of complaints involves conduct that impacts on the functions of the college, including but not restricted to:

- 1) Diplomates:
 - a. Examination integrity, such as sharing of examination questions, knowingly allowing candidates to obtain advantage in examination through any means
 - b. Recertification of themselves or their colleagues, such as false declarations
 - c. Supervision of residents
 - d. Discharge of duties as an officer of the college
- 2) Residents or candidates of examinations:
 - a. Submission of credentials and examinations
 - i. Plagiarism, false authorship or collusion regarding submitted evidence or publications
 - ii. Fabrication or misrepresentation of research materials, credentials forms, or case logs
 - iii. Examination misconduct including but not limited to
 1. Copying from the examination script of another candidate.
 2. Obtaining or offering any other assistance from or to another candidate (or any other person unless an approved reader or scribe).
 3. Accessing unauthorised resources including books, journals or electronic devices
 4. Communication with others directly or through electronic means.
 5. Allowing themselves to be impersonated or when any person impersonates another examination candidate.
 6. Sharing examination question with future candidates through question banks
 - b. Certification (false rotation/externship documents)

RAISING OF COMPLAINTS

Complaints against ECVN members or residents should ordinarily be addressed to the ECVN secretary. Complaints can be addressed to any other ECVN executive committee member not involved in the complaint, usually the President or, alternatively, the vice-President. The College will only consider non-anonymous complaints against individuals that impact on the functions of the college.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

ECVN executive committee members who are specifically mentioned in the complaint should not be involved in the decision-making process. In cases relating to the examination process, no member of the examination committee should be involved in the decision-making process.

INITIATION OF INVESTIGATIONS

Where the Executive Committee consider that there may be evidence of misconduct an investigation should be initiated. The Executive Committee should promptly, appoint an **investigating officer**, either from within the college, from another EBVS college or from EBVS. The investigating officer will be independent and have no current or historical relationship with the individual or prior knowledge of the allegations.

Where the Executive Committee considers the allegation to be professional behaviour then the allegations should be referred to the national competent authority where that veterinarian is registered.

CONDUCT OF INVESTIGATIONS

The investigating officer should inform the individual in writing, normally within 10 working days, setting out the details of the allegations including the names of the complaining individuals. (Anonymity might be exceptionally decided by the Executive Committee after unanimous vote. Executive committee members involved in the complaints should not be part of the vote.) Initial

notification should include definition of timelines for the investigation. It may be appropriate at that time to organise an interview, or the investigation officer may require more time to collect evidence.

The individual may object to the appointment of the Investigating Officer where they believe a conflict of interest exists. This must be done in writing to the president of the ECVN. If the objection is upheld by the executive committee then an alternate investigating officer should be appointed.

The investigation officer should undertake an investigation and prepare a report for presentation to the Executive Committee:

- a. Collect all evidence from relevant sources.
- b. Write to the individual (example below)
 - Inviting them to attend a meeting (physical or online) to discuss the allegations and evidence (with at least 10 working days' notice)
Reasonable requests for a different meeting date should be considered
 - Meetings will not take place whilst the individual has ongoing exams or is on leave from their place of work for whatever reason.
 - Allow them to be accompanied at that meeting by a 'supporter'
 1. Their residency supervisor
 2. A current line manager / professional colleague
 3. A current resident of the college or ombudsperson
 4. Another diplomate of the college
 - The purpose of that supporter is to assist in any misunderstanding, to ask for questions to be rephrased where no understanding exists or to ensure the individual is afforded breaks as required. They may not answer questions on the individual's behalf.
 - The individual should inform the investigating officer who will be attending as supporter in advance of the meeting. It is not appropriate for an individual to be supported by others involved in any of the process (eg college board, invigilator etc)
 - Individuals may not ordinarily be accompanied by family members or legal representatives
 - If the individual does not respond to a written request to attend the meeting, the Investigating Officer may continue with the preparation of the report without their involvement provided they have been given adequate opportunity to make representations.
 - Where possible, identify potential sources of support for the individual
- c. It may be necessary to collect further evidence after the initial letter has been sent, especially where individuals who need to be interviewed or asked for evidence are directly connected with the individual.
 - Such evidence must be shared with the individual prior to the meeting with at least 2 working days.
 - The date of any meeting should be delayed if the additional evidence is extensive and the individual requests longer to review this.
- d. A meeting should be attended by the investigating officer, a scribe, the individual and their supporter, and should be recorded. In the meeting the investigating officer will:
 - Ensure the individual is aware of the definition of academic misconduct
 - Explain the possible sanctions if the allegations are proven
 - Set out the case against the individual and ensure they understand these accusations.
 - Recognise that there are factors which may impact an individual's ability to respond to questioning, such as spoken English Language ability, a Specific Learning Difference or stress.
Individuals may prepare a written statement prior to the meeting if they believe they may be likely to respond poorly in this setting.
 - Ask the individual to respond, including providing details of any mitigating circumstances. Mitigating circumstances will not exempt an individual from a finding of misconduct. However, if the mitigating circumstances have a direct impact on the case, they may take this into account when determining a proportionate penalty, should misconduct be deemed to have taken place.
- e. Provide a brief written summary of the meeting that:
 - Summarises the allegations
 - Documents if the allegations amount to misconduct and explain why
 - Summarises the individuals own account of events

The summary should be sent to the individual allowing them to make any changes to the presentation of facts at the meeting, but may not provide additional evidence or change their statement presented in the meeting. Individuals must reply to this summary within 5 working days. If no response is received it will be assumed that no changes are required and will be taken as confirmation of its contents.

- f. Allow an opportunity for the individual to provide a statement after the meeting for inclusion in the Investigating officer's report

The investigating Officers report should normally be completed within 30 working days of the date of notification of the allegation. However in some circumstances and for complex cases, this may not be possible and the Investigating Officer will inform the individual if the investigation will take more than 30 working days.

INVESTIGATING OFFICERS REPORT

The Investigating officers report should contain:

- a. The identity of the individual
- b. The allegations
- c. A statement of all evidence considered
- d. A summary of the findings of the investigation
- e. A recommendation of whether the Investigating Officer considers the allegations proven
- f. A summary of any mitigations
- g. A presentation of all evidence gathered as appendices

STANDARD OF PROOF

Complaints are considered by the College based on the civil standard of proof (otherwise referred to as the balance of probabilities).

OUTCOME OF INVESTIGATION

On receipt of the Investigating Officers report the Executive Committee shall swiftly review the report and determine whether the allegations are upheld. If the allegations are not considered upheld then the allegations shall be dismissed.

If the allegations are considered upheld then mitigations should be considered. The outcomes available to the Executive Committee at this stage are:

- a. Dismissal of the allegations
- b. Warnings
- c. Undertakings
- d. Conditions that will not significantly impact on the role of the individual
- e. Referral to an Independent Disciplinary Panel

Where the recommended conditions have greater impact upon the earning potential of the individual, The Executive Committee should refer the case to a Disciplinary panel. Where the Executive Committee is not unanimously in agreement then the allegations should be referred to an Independent Disciplinary Panel.

On receipt of the outcome from the Executive Committee the individual can request that the case is referred to an Independent Disciplinary panel.

INDEPENDENT DISCIPLINARY PANELS

Independent disciplinary panels should be composed of three independent EBVS specialists and could be chaired by someone outside of the college, who ideally has experience of conducting such panels in academic settings.

The Independent Disciplinary Panel should consider the verbal and or written reports of the individual and the investigating officer either in person or asynchronously. The panel must consider any responses from the individual to the Investigating Officers Report.

The panel should first determine if the allegations are upheld, based on the civil standard of proof. The panel should only consider mitigations when it comes to selecting appropriate sanctions. Sanctions must be considered one by one, in order of severity, starting with the least severe.

The panel may impose sanctions as considered appropriate. These may include:

- a. Warning to the individual that there is evidence of misconduct, but not to the point requiring sanctions
- b. Imposition of a sanction, beginning with the least severe the sanctions are
 - i. Undertakings
 - ii. Conditions
 - iii. Expulsion / Permanent exclusion from the college
- c. Imposition of an Academic Penalty in the case of examination misconduct:

- a. Academic penalties result in a reduction in the score awarded. The recommendations for the degree of academic penalty will depend on several factors and may include:
 - i. The imposition of a score of zero
 - ii. A percentage reduction in score

APPEALS

An individual may submit an appeal to the ECVN following the normal college appeals process. Grounds for appeal include

1. Procedural irregularity in the investigation, allegation handling by the Executive Committee or the Independent Disciplinary Panel
2. Prejudice or bias by the investigating officer, the Executive Committee or the Independent Disciplinary Panel
3. Manifestly unreasonable sanctions

Appeals against decision must demonstrate flaws in the process for reviewing the allegations. They are not an opportunity to present fresh evidence or to submit character statements.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND RECORD KEEPING

- Where an allegation is dismissed by the Executive Committee without the need for an investigation, the individual will not normally be informed of the allegation.
- On conclusion of the investigation the investigating officer / disciplinary panel members must forward all records and emails relating to the investigation to the college president and delete all records from any devices, email accounts or cloud storage.
- If an allegation is dismissed, either before or after an investigation, all records of the allegation will be removed from the college records and emails.
- In the event of warnings or sanctions, the college will retain permanent records of the outcomes of the allegation and a summary of these findings.
- In the event of warnings, the president of the college will determine appropriate retention of the outcomes of the investigation/panel based on the advice of the investigating officer / disciplinary panel
- In any event, all confidential records of interviews, notes etc, will be retained by the college in a central document store for a maximum of 12 months, unless an appeal is received. The college may extend this if required but must inform the individual of this.
- Colleges may only retain summary details (name, offence, outcome) after this time and ONLY if the allegations were proven.
- Colleges must share details with the EBVS secretary of any proven allegations, who may, in turn, share details with ABVS or other EBVS colleges should the individual register elsewhere. The college and EBVS should retain summary details in perpetuity.
- The College should determine whether the national competent authority should be informed of the allegations. However, the conclusions of the college are not superseded by national competent authorities who may have different threshold for professional misconduct to academic misconduct.
- The personal data of the individual will be processed by the college and maintained by the college in compliance with data protection law of the country of the college's registration.

Conduct of meetings

1. All meetings will be scheduled around the working schedule of the individual, but within a maximum of 30 days of notification.
2. Where an individual does not attend without explanation, the meeting may go ahead and consider the evidence as presented.
3. Where urgent clinical pressures prevent attendance at a meeting, it should be considered whether it is reasonable to reschedule a meeting.
4. Note takers should represent the college but should not form part of the process or ask questions.
 - a. The notes of the meeting should be shared within 5 working days of the meeting and agreed by both parties within a further 5 working days.
5. Where an individual's first language limits engagement with the college, another person may be appointed by the college to act as a translator. Their views should not be considered within any decision-making process.

6. Individuals may be accompanied by a supporter who may be a work colleague or diplomate, but not a legal representative.

Communication

1. All communication will be factual and avoid language that may be considered unnecessarily inflammatory.
2. All efforts will be made to understand the working patterns of the individual and avoid sending notifications when the individual may lack support structures (eg at weekends for those with a normal 5 day working week)
3. All communication must be secure and any confidential information encrypted if sent by email.
4. The outcomes of the process will only be shared with the individual and the smallest number of executive / board members. Other individuals who may have brought the conduct to the attention of the college will only be informed that the investigation has been concluded, but not the outcome.
5. The outcomes will be confidential, except for where an individual is expelled from the college and no longer becomes an EBVS specialist.
 - a. EBVS will be informed of the removal and may communicate this to relevant national regulators who hold national lists of veterinary specialists.
 - b. No public statement would be made and no comments about the reasons for removal will be discussed with any third party.
 - c. If the individual continues to claim to continue to be an EBVS specialist, then a public statement to this effect may be given.

Time lines

Time lines for any allegation must be established, however given the need for flexibility, may be extended at the discretion of the president of the college. The individual must be informed of likely timelines and any amendments, but would normally conclude within 60 days.

EXAMPLE LETTER FOR ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms,

I am writing to invite you to a meeting to discuss an allegation of academic misconduct by way of [type of misconduct suspected i.e. plagiarism/collusion etc] in [type of assessment] for [COLLEGE]. The meeting will take place at [Time] on [Date giving the candidate at least 5 calendar days' notice]. The meeting will be held online and upon confirmation of attendance you will be sent a meeting link. A recording of the meeting will be made and shared with both parties. Failure to attend the meeting will require the appointed investigating officer to formulate their advice based only on the evidence available to them.

This meeting is being arranged following the published complaints procedures of the ECVN EBVS guidance [provide appropriate links].

Please find details of the allegation and the evidence to be discussed at the upcoming meeting; (If applicable please input details of the allegation and the evidence that will be discussed within the meeting i.e., sources, exam script, assessment etc. – where appropriate).

The following people are expected to be present at the meeting:

Name (Investigating Officer)

Name (Note-taker)

You may be accompanied to the meeting by a supporter. The supporter must be either; your supervisor or current employment line manager, a current resident of the college or a suitable diplomate of the college or a representative selected from your college such as a mentor, resident or Union representative. The supporter may take notes on your behalf, make representations on your behalf and ask questions, but may not answer questions on your behalf. You may present a written statement, but you will be asked to answer questions in person. You may not be accompanied by family members or legal representatives.

Should you wish to request any adjustments on the basis of a disability which will enable you to access the meeting effectively, please let me know as soon as possible.

After the meeting the misconduct officer will formulate a report and recommendations to the board of your college. This may include the formation of a panel of independent experts where you will be asked to attend (virtually). At the conclusion of the investigation, the college may, if the misconduct is proven, impose sanctions against you. The sanctions available if the allegations are upheld include

- a. Undertakings or conditions
- b. Academic penalties (reduction in scores awarded)
- c. Permanent exclusion from the college

The college may also share the outcomes of this investigation with your competent national authority if we believe professional misconduct has occurred.

If you consider that I am unsuitable to act as the investigating officer in this allegation you may object on the basis of a demonstrable conflict of interest to the President of the College [\[email of president\]](#).

We acknowledge the distress that comes with receiving this letter, but assure you that you will be treated fairly throughout the investigation. You may like to consider reaching out to support of friends and colleagues or from your national regulator.

Please acknowledge receipt of this letter by return including

- a) Confirmation that you are able to attend the meeting, or a request for an alternative time
- b) The name of the individual who will be accompanying you
- c) Any support needed to allow you to access the meeting.

Please do not submit a written response to the allegations in your response.