

**ROYAL COLLEGE OF VETERINARY SURGEONS
INQUIRY RE:**

CHELSEA JADE STRANGWAY RVN

DECISION OF THE DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE ON PROCEEDING IN ABSENCE

1. At the outset of the hearing, but after the charges were put to the Respondent, Chelsea Strangeway, and admitted by her, she informed the Committee that she was no longer working in the veterinary profession, and was only able to attend the hearing on the first day until midday, and thereafter only between the hours of 12.00 to 1pm on subsequent days.
2. In these circumstances, the Committee decided that the College should make an application for permission to proceed in the absence of the Respondent at times when she was unable to attend. The Respondent indicated that she was content for the hearing to proceed in that way, if necessary.
3. Counsel for the College duly made that application. The Respondent was present at the hearing when this application was made. Counsel referred the Committee to the case of *R v Jones* and the principles to be considered when such an application was made in a civil regulatory case. Counsel submitted that this was an unusual case, but it was clear that the Respondent deliberately decided to absent herself from the hearing in the way described above, and, thus, her absences would be voluntary. Counsel stressed that the Committee had a discretion as to whether to grant such an application, but should use that discretion with great care.
4. The Committee had to consider the question of fairness between the interests of the Respondent and the interests of the College. This was a balancing exercise. Counsel submitted that there was no application by the Respondent to adjourn for representation. She had admitted all the charges at the commencement of the hearing. She indicated that she did not dispute the facts set out in the College's evidence. There would be no risk of improper conclusions being drawn by the Committee, which should draw no inferences from her absence. Counsel submitted that these were serious charges, and it was in the public interest to proceed.

5. The Legal Assessor advised the Committee that counsel for the College had correctly outlined the principles and tests to be applied when considering whether to grant an application to proceed in the absence of the Respondent. He noted that this was an unusual case, but the Respondent was content for the Committee to continue with the hearing at times when she was unable to be present. The Legal Assessor reminded the Committee that the Respondent had admitted all the charges including dishonesty. Although it was a matter for the Committee, the Legal Assessor advised the Committee that, in these unusual circumstances, it would be in the public interest for this hearing to proceed.
6. The Committee accepted the submissions of counsel for the College, and the advice of the Legal Assessor.
7. The Committee decided that it would be fair and just to proceed in the absence of the Respondent in this case, as and when it was necessary to do so. The Committee considered that it was in the interests of both the College and the Respondent for this course to be adopted in this case.

Disciplinary Committee
21 September 2022