

HEARING PARTLY HEARD IN PRIVATE*

*The Committee has made a determination in this case that includes some private information.
That information has been omitted from the text.

TIMMINS, Sophie Louise

Registration No: 130663

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT COMMITTEE

JUNE 2023

Outcome: Erased with Immediate Suspension

TIMMINS, Sophie Louise, a dental nurse, National Certificate NEBDSA 1993, was summoned to appear before the Professional Conduct Committee on 05 June 2023 for an inquiry into the following charge:

Charge

That being registered as a Dental Nurse:

1. "Between June 2020 and March 2021, you forged the signature of your mentor, Mr A, on the document(s) listed in Schedule 1, which formed part of your 'Record of Competence', required for the completion of the Certificate of Sedation Dental Nursing.
2. Between June 2020 and March 2021, you forged the signature of a colleague, Ms B, on the document(s) listed in Schedule 2, which formed part of your 'Record of Competence', required for the completion of the Certificate of Sedation Dental Nursing.
3. You falsified the details of purported intravenous sedation treatment detailed in your 'Record of Competence', by representing that such treatment took place on the occasion referred to when it had not, in the document(s) listed in Schedule 3.
4. On or around 3 March 2021 you submitted all of the documents referred to in particulars 1, 2 and 3, to your Dental Sedation Nursing tutor knowing that they contained forged signatures or false information.
5. On or around 3 March 2021 you submitted document(s) listed in Schedule 3 to your Dental Sedation Nursing tutor knowing that it contained false information, namely that the purported sedation treatment referred to did not in fact take place.

¹ Schedule 1 is a private document which cannot be disclosed.

¹ Schedule 2 is a private document which cannot be disclosed.

¹ Schedule 3 is a private document which cannot be disclosed.

6. On 3 March 2021 at 17:30 you submitted a document to your Dental Sedation Nursing tutor with a doctored case number.
7. Your conduct in respect of 1 and/or 2 and/or 3 and/or 4 and/or 5 and/or 6 was:
 - a. Misleading; and/or
 - b. Dishonest.

And that by reasons of the matters alleged above, your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of misconduct.”

Mrs Timmins was not present and was not represented. On 05 June 2023, the Chairman made statements regarding the preliminary applications. On 7 June 2023, the Chairman announced the findings of fact to the Counsel for the GDC:

1. “This is a hearing before the Professional Conduct Committee (PCC). The hearing is being held remotely using Microsoft Teams in line with the Dental Professionals Hearings Service’s current practice.
2. Mrs Timmins is not present and is not represented in her absence. Mr Christopher Saad of counsel, instructed by Ms Saba Khan of the General Dental Council’s (GDC’s) In-House Legal Presentation Service, appears for the GDC.

Service of notice of hearing

3. On behalf of the GDC Mr Saad submitted that service of notice of this hearing has been properly effected in accordance with Rules 13 and 65 of the General Dental Council (Fitness to Practise) Rules 2006 (‘the Rules’). On 28 April 2023 a notice of hearing was sent to the address that Mrs Timmins has registered with the GDC, setting out the date, time and remote nature of this hearing. The notice was sent using the Royal Mail’s Special Delivery postal service. The Royal Mail’s Track and Trace service records that the notice was delivered on the morning of 29 April 2023. Copies of the notice were also sent to Mrs Timmins by first class post and by email.
4. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser. The Committee was satisfied that service has been properly effected in accordance with the Rules.

Proceeding in absence

5. The Committee then went on to consider whether to exercise its discretion to proceed in the absence of Mrs Timmins in accordance with Rule 54 of the Rules. Mr Saad on behalf of the GDC invited the Committee to proceed in Mrs Timmins’ absence.

6. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser. The Committee was mindful that its discretion to conduct a hearing in the absence of a registrant should be exercised with the utmost care and caution. In considering the matter the Committee had particular regard to the public interest in the expeditious disposal of the case, the potential inconvenience that might be caused to witnesses or others, and fairness to Mrs Timmins.
7. The Committee considers that the GDC has made every effort to inform Mrs Timmins of the fact of this hearing. The Committee considers that Mrs Timmins has voluntarily absented herself from this hearing. It considers that an adjournment, which has not been sought, would be unlikely to secure Mrs Timmins' attendance at a rescheduled hearing. In determining to proceed in Mrs Timmins' absence the Committee was mindful of the public interest in an expeditious consideration of this case, the potential inconvenience that might be caused to the GDC and its witnesses, and the possible effect on witnesses' memories that an adjournment may have."

Further preliminary matters

1. "The Committee's decisions on service of the notice of the hearing and proceeding in Mrs Timmins' absence are set out in a separate determination dated 5 June 2023.
2. On 5 June 2023 Mr Saad informed the Committee that Schedules 1 to 3 as referred to at the heads of charge need not be kept private. The Committee noted that those schedules can be publicly viewed.
3. On that same day, namely 5 June 2023, Mr Saad invited the Committee to hold the hearing partly in private in accordance with Rule 53 when reference is made in the hearing to Mrs Timmins' health and private life. Having accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser, the Committee determined that it would be appropriate and in the interests of justice for the hearing to be held partly in private when reference is made to Mrs Timmins' health and private life.

Background to the case and summary of allegations

4. The allegations giving rise to this hearing arise out of Mrs Timmins' keeping and submission of documents as part of her 'Record of Competence' pursuant to a dental nursing qualification, namely a Certificate of Sedation, which was to be awarded as a post-registration qualification by the National Examination Board of Dental Nurses.
5. It is alleged that, between June 2020 and March 2021, Mrs Timmins forged the signature of her mentor, who is a dentist and who is referred to for the purposes of these proceedings as Mr A, on four documents. It is also alleged that, in the same period, Mrs Timmins forged the signature of her colleague, who is a dental nurse and who is referred to as Ms B, on a further eight documents.

These documents formed part of Mrs Timmins' Record of Competence which was required for the successful completion of the Certificate of Sedation.

6. The GDC also alleges that Mrs Timmins falsified the details of purported sedation treatment detailed in her Record of Competence by representing on six of the documents referred to above that such treatment had taken place on a specific occasion when in fact it had not.
7. The GDC further contends that, on or around 3 March 2021, Mrs Timmins submitted all of the above documents to her dental sedation nursing tutor, who is referred to as Mr C, knowing that they contained forged signatures and/or false information, namely that the purported sedation treatment referred to did not in fact take place.

Evidence

8. The Committee has been provided with documentary material in relation to the heads of charge that Mrs Timmins faces, namely the witness statements and documentary exhibits of Mr A, Ms B and Mr C. This includes two audio recordings of investigatory and disciplinary meetings with Mrs Timmins, Mr A and Ms B.
9. The Committee heard oral evidence from Mr A, Ms B and Mr C.

Committee's findings of fact

10. The Committee has taken into account all the evidence presented to it, both documentary and oral. It has considered the submissions made by Mr Saad on behalf of the GDC.
11. The Committee has accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser. The Committee is mindful that the burden of proof lies with the GDC, and has considered the heads of charge against the civil standard of proof, that is to say, the balance of probabilities. The Committee has considered each head of charge separately.
12. I will now announce the Committee's findings in relation to each head of charge:

1.	<p><i>Between June 2020 and March 2021, you forged the signature of your mentor, Mr A, on the document(s) listed in Schedule 1, which formed part of your 'Record of Competence', required for the completion of the Certificate of Sedation Dental Nursing.</i></p> <p><u><i>Schedule 1</i></u></p> <p><i>Documents referred to an investigatory meeting attended by the Registrant on 10th March 2021 as:</i></p> <p><i>i) Appendix 4;</i></p> <p><i>ii) Appendix 5;</i></p>
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	<p>iii) Appendix 6; iv) Appendix 7.</p> <p>Proved</p>
	<p>The Committee finds the facts alleged at head of charge 1 proved.</p> <p>In an investigatory meeting that Mr A held with Mrs Timmins on 10 March 2021, the audio recording of which the Committee heard, Mrs Timmins admitted that she had forged Mr A's signature on the documents set out at Schedule 1. Mr A's evidence is that the signature that appears on those documents is not his signature. The Committee found that it was able to rely on the evidence of Mr A as being credible and consistent. In light of the evidence presented to it, the Committee finds that Mrs Timmins forged Mr A's signature on the documents in question.</p> <p>The Committee therefore finds the facts alleged at head of charge 1 proved.</p>
2.	<p><i>Between June 2020 and March 2021, you forged the signature of a colleague, Ms B, on the document(s) listed in Schedule 2, which formed part of your 'Record of Competence', required for the completion of the Certificate of Sedation Dental Nursing.</i></p> <p><u>Schedule 2</u></p> <p><i>Documents referred to an investigatory meeting attended by the Registrant, held on 10th March 2021, as:</i></p> <p>i) Appendix 8; ii) Appendix 9; iii) Appendix 10; iv) Appendix 11; v) Appendix 12; vi) Appendix 13; vii) Appendix 14; viii) Appendix 15.</p> <p>Proved</p>
	<p>The Committee finds the facts alleged at head of charge 2 proved.</p> <p>In the investigatory meeting that Mr A held with Mrs Timmins on 10 March 2021, which, as set out above, the audio recording of which the Committee heard, Mrs Timmins admitted that she had forged Ms B's signature on the documents set out at Schedule 2. Ms B's evidence was that the signatures set out at Schedule 2 were not her signatures. The Committee found that it</p>

	<p>was able to rely on the evidence of Ms B as being credible and consistent. In light of the evidence presented to it, the Committee finds that Mrs Timmins forged Ms B's signature on the documents in question.</p> <p>The Committee therefore finds the facts alleged at head of charge 2 proved.</p>
3.	<p><i>You falsified the details of purported intravenous sedation treatment detailed in your 'Record of Competence', by representing that such treatment took place on the occasion referred to when it had not, in the document(s) listed in Schedule 3.</i></p> <p><u>Schedule 3</u></p> <p><i>Documents referred to an investigatory meeting attended by the Registrant, held on 10th March 2021, as:</i></p> <p><i>i) Appendix 8;</i></p> <p><i>ii) Appendix 9;</i></p> <p><i>iii) Appendix 10;</i></p> <p><i>iv) Appendix 11;</i></p> <p><i>v) Appendix 12;</i></p> <p><i>vi) Appendix 13.</i></p> <p>Proved</p>
	<p>The Committee finds the facts alleged at head of charge 3 proved.</p> <p>The evidence presented to the Committee in the form of appointment lists is that no patient sedation treatment took place on the dates set out by Mrs Timmins on the documents set out at Schedule 3, namely 23 and 25 June 2020. Ms B, who has produced these appointment lists as evidence, told the Committee that she had checked the appointment lists for those and other dates and established that the six documents at Schedule 3 which bore her forged signature were for dates on which no sedation treatment took place, namely 23 and 25 June 2020.</p> <p>The Committee took account of Mrs Timmins' account as put forward as part of her employer's investigation of these matters, namely that she may have made a mistake as to the date(s) on which sedation treatment took place when writing the documents at Schedule 3, but she maintained that sedation treatment did take place in relation to a specific named patient. Although the Committee took this evidence into consideration, it preferred the evidence put forward by Ms B as referred to above as being more credible and consistent. Indeed, the evidence presented to the Committee is that this patient did not receive any sedation treatment until some months later, namely October 2020.</p>

	<p>The Committee accordingly finds that Mrs Timmins falsified the details of purported intravenous sedation treatment on the documents at Schedule 3 by purporting that such treatment had taken place when it had in fact not taken place.</p> <p>The Committee therefore finds the facts alleged at head of charge 3 proved.</p>
4.	<p><i>On or around 3 March 2021 you submitted all of the documents referred to in particulars 1, 2 and 3, to your Dental Sedation Nursing tutor knowing that they contained forged signatures or false information.</i></p> <p>Proved in relation to forged signatures</p>
	<p>The Committee finds the facts alleged at head of charge 4 proved in relation to forged signatures.</p> <p>The Committee has found above at heads of charge 1 and 2 that Mrs Timmins forged the signatures of two colleagues, namely Mr A and Ms B, on a total of 12 documents set out at Schedules 1 and 2. There is no allegation at head of charge 3 that Mrs Timmins forged signatures. The evidence of Mrs Timmins' dental sedation nursing tutor, namely Mr C, is that Mrs Timmins submitted those documents to him on 3 March 2021. The evidence presented to the Committee, and in particular the comments that Mrs Timmins made at her investigatory interview held on 10 March 2021 as referred to above, is that Mrs Timmins admitted that those documents contained forged signatures.</p> <p>IN PRIVATE</p> <p>[text omitted]</p> <p>IN PUBLIC</p> <p>Whilst the Committee noted Mrs Timmins' account as summarised in the previous paragraph, the Committee considered that it was implausible that Mrs Timmins did not know that she was forging signatures and submitting forged signatures.</p> <p>At the outset of the hearing Mr Saad informed the Committee that head of charge 4 relates primarily to the alleged forging of signatures, and that the phrase 'false information' is not intended to relate to the false information specifically referred to at head of charge 5 below.</p> <p>In approaching this head of charge the Committee has considered whether Mrs Timmins submitted the documents at Schedules 1 and 2 with forged signatures, which is the subject of its findings at heads of charge 1 and 2, and whether she submitted the documents at Schedule 3 containing false information, which is the subject of its finding at head of charge 3.</p> <p>The Committee notes that there are no documents set out at Schedule 3,</p>

	<p>which in accordance with head of charge 3 concerns ‘false information’, that are not set out at Schedule 2, which as set out at head of charge 2 concerns the forging of signatures. In approaching this head of charge the Committee has not considered whether, in submitting the documents referred to at Schedule 3, Mrs Timmins knew that those documents contained false information about whether such treatment took place. The Committee notes that the contention that Mrs Timmins submitted false information that purported sedation treatment took place when in fact it had not taken place is expressly dealt with at the next head of charge, namely head of charge 5.</p> <p>Instead, in approaching head of charge 4 concerning ‘false information’, the Committee has confined its consideration whether there were other potentially false items of information in the six documents listed at Schedule 3. The Committee has not made findings, nor been provided with any evidence, of different types of false information. The Committee notes that the GDC has raised a separate head of charge dealing with an allegation about a doctored case number at head of charge 6 below, and accordingly that contention has not formed part of its consideration of head of charge 4.</p> <p>The Committee therefore finds the facts alleged at head of charge 4 proved in relation to forged signatures.</p>
5.	<p><i>On or around 3 March 2021 you submitted document(s) listed in Schedule 3 to your Dental Sedation Nursing tutor knowing that it contained false information, namely that the purported sedation treatment referred to did not in fact take place.</i></p> <p>Proved</p>
	<p>The Committee finds the facts alleged at head of charge 5 proved.</p> <p>The Committee has found above at head of charge 3 that Mrs Timmins submitted six documents set out at Schedule 3 which contained false information, namely that the purported sedation treatment referred to in those documents took place when in fact such treatment had not taken place. The evidence of Mrs Timmins’ dental sedation nursing tutor, namely Mr C, is that Mrs Timmins submitted those documents to him on 3 March 2021.</p> <p>The Committee again took account of Mrs Timmins’ account as put forward as part of her employer’s investigation of these matters, namely that she may have made a mistake as to the date(s) on which sedation treatment took place when writing the documents at Schedule 3, but she maintained that sedation treatment did take place in relation to a specific named patient. The Committee rejected this account in its finding at head of charge 3 above. Having found that Mrs Timmins falsified the documents at Schedule 3, it considers that it is implausible for Mrs Timmins not to have known that she</p>

	<p>had done so when she submitted that information to Mr C. The Committee finds that Mrs Timmins submitted the documents set out at Schedule 3 to Mr C knowing that the sedation treatments referred to on those documents did not in fact take place.</p> <p>Accordingly, the Committee finds the facts alleged at head of charge 5 proved.</p>
6.	<p><i>On 3 March 2021 at 17:30 you submitted a document to your Dental Sedation Nursing tutor with a doctored case number.</i></p> <p>Not proved</p>
	<p>The Committee finds the facts alleged at head of charge 6 not proved.</p> <p>The Committee notes the evidence of Mr C in relation to this head of charge, namely that Mrs Timmins submitted a further copy of a previously-submitted treatment log. Mr C's evidence is that the document was identical, save for a 'doctored' case number. Mr C did not state in his evidence, either oral or written, to which previously-submitted document he was comparing the allegedly doctored document. The Committee was taken by Mr Saad to a document which bears some similarities, but which importantly bears a different heading, namely '<i>preparing sedation equipment and drugs reads for intravenous sedation</i>', to that which appears on the allegedly doctored document, namely '<i>drawing up drugs</i>'.</p> <p>In the circumstances the Committee found that the GDC has not demonstrated to the standard required that Mrs Timmins submitted a document bearing a doctored case number. Accordingly, the Committee finds the facts alleged at head of charge 6 not proved.</p>
7.	<p><i>Your conduct in respect of 1 and/or 2 and/or 3 and/or 4 and/or 5 and/or 6 was:</i></p>
7. (a)	<p><i>Misleading; and/or</i></p> <p>Proved in relation to heads of charge 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5</p>
	<p>As the Committee found head of charge 6 above not proved, that head of charge does not fall to be considered in respect of head of charge 7 (a).</p> <p>The Committee finds the facts alleged at head of charge 7 (a) proved in respect of heads of charge 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.</p> <p>The Committee has found above at heads of charge 1, 2 and 3 that Mrs Timmins forged the signatures of two colleagues and set out false information about purported treatment on a number of documents which formed part of her Record of Competence in connection with a dental nursing qualification, namely a Certificate of Sedation. The Committee then found at heads of charge 4 and 5 that Mrs Timmins submitted those</p>

	<p>documents to a third colleague, who was her tutor, despite knowing that those documents contained forged signatures or false information, or, in some cases, both.</p> <p>The Committee considers that Mrs Timmins' conduct as found at heads of charge 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 was misleading, as it was likely to have led Mr C and the National Examination Board of Dental Nurses to believe that the documents that she submitted were genuine when that was not in fact the case. The forging of signatures and the provision of false information gave a misleading impression that the documents in question had been properly countersigned and that the sedation treatment as set out had taken place. As these documents were submitted in support of a formal post-registration qualification, it was important that the documents that Mrs Timmins submitted were accurate so that an informed decision could ultimately be taken about awarding her the qualification in question. Misleading information of the sort submitted by Mrs Timmins may therefore have been awarded a qualification to which she may not have been entitled, and this may have had consequences for safe and effective care.</p> <p>Therefore, the Committee finds the facts alleged at head of charge 7 (a) proved in respect of heads of charge 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.</p>
7. (b)	<p><i>Dishonest.</i></p> <p>Proved in relation to heads of charge 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5</p>
	<p>As the Committee found head of charge 6 above not proved, that head of charge does not fall to be considered in respect of head of charge 7 (b).</p> <p>The Committee has found above at heads of charge 1, 2 and 3 that Mrs Timmins forged the signatures of two colleagues and set out false information about purported treatment on a number of documents which formed part of her Record of Competence in connection with a dental nursing qualification, namely a Certificate of Sedation. The Committee then found at heads of charge 4 and 5 that Mrs Timmins submitted those documents to a third colleague, who was her tutor, despite knowing that those documents contained forged signatures or false information, or, in some cases, both. The Committee has found at head of charge 7 (a) that such conduct was misleading.</p> <p>The Committee finds the facts alleged at head of charge 7 (b) proved in respect of heads of charge 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.</p> <p>In approaching this head of charge the Committee applied the test set out in <i>Ivey v Genting Casinos (UK) Ltd. t/a Crockfords</i> [2017] UKSC 67. The test is that the Committee must decide subjectively the actual state of an individual's knowledge or belief as to the facts, and must then apply the objective standards of ordinary and decent people to determine whether the</p>

individual's conduct was dishonest by those standards.

The Committee finds that Mrs Timmins' state of mind at the relevant time was that she was aware that she forged the signatures of two of her colleagues, and that, subsequently, she knew that she submitted those forged documents to a third colleague, who was her tutor. The Committee also considers that her state of mind in relation to the provision of false information was, similarly, that she knew that the information that she provided about sedation treatment was false. The Committee has found that Mrs Timmins forged her colleagues' signatures and recorded false information on repeated occasions in a deliberate manner, and that her subsequent actions in submitting information which she knew to be false was similarly deliberate. The Committee considers that Mrs Timmins was motivated by a desire to pass a qualification. In short, Mrs Timmins cheated to advance her interests.

The Committee then applied the objective standards of ordinary and decent people to determine whether Mrs Timmins' conduct was dishonest. The Committee considers that Mrs Timmins' conduct would be viewed as dishonest by reference to those standards, and would be interpreted as an attempt to frustrate the proper assessment of her suitability for a dental nursing sedation qualification.

Accordingly, the Committee finds the facts alleged at head of charge 7 (b) proved in respect of heads of charge 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

We move to stage two."

On 8th June 2023 the Chairman announced the determination as follows:

Proceedings at stage two

"The Committee has considered all the evidence presented to it. It has taken into account the submissions made by Mr Saad on behalf of the GDC. In its deliberations the Committee has had regard to the GDC's *Guidance for the Practice Committees, including Indicative Sanctions Guidance* (October 2016, updated December 2020). The Committee has accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser.

Evidence

1. The Committee has been not provided with any further oral or documentary evidence at this stage of the hearing.

Fitness to practise history

2. Mr Saad on behalf of the GDC addressed the Committee in accordance with Rule 20 (1) (a) of the General Dental Council (Fitness to Practise) Rules 2006 ('the Rules'). He confirmed that Mrs Timmins has no fitness to practise history with the GDC.

Submissions

3. Mr Saad submitted that the facts that the Committee has found proved amount to misconduct, that Mrs Timmins' fitness to practise is impaired by reason of that misconduct, and that erasure from the register would be the appropriate and proportionate sanction.

Misconduct

4. The Committee first considered whether the facts that it has found proved constitute misconduct. In considering this matter, the Committee has exercised its own independent judgment.
5. In its deliberations the Committee has had regard to the following paragraphs of the GDC's *Standards for the Dental Team* (September 2013) in place at the time of the incidents giving rise to the facts that it has found proved. These paragraphs state that as a dental care professional:
 - 1.3 [You must] be honest and act with integrity.
 - 1.3.1 You must justify the trust that patients, the public and your colleagues place in you by always acting honestly and fairly in your dealings with them. This applies to any business or education activities in which you are involved as well as to your professional dealings.
 - 1.3.2 You must make sure you do not bring the profession into disrepute.
 - 9.1 [You must] ensure that your conduct, both at work and in your personal life, justifies patients' trust in you and the public's trust in the dental profession.
 - 9.2 [You must] protect patients and colleagues from risks posed by your health, conduct or performance.
6. The case relates to Mrs Timmins' making and submission of documents as part of her 'Record of Competence' pursuant to a dental nursing qualification, namely a Certificate of Sedation, which was to be awarded as a post-registration qualification by the National Examination Board of Dental Nurses. The Committee found that Mrs Timmins forged the signatures of two colleagues, and set out false information about purported treatment, on a number of documents which formed part of her Record of Competence. The Committee found that Mrs Timmins submitted those documents to a third colleague, who was her tutor, despite knowing that those documents contained forged signatures or false information, or, in some cases, both. The Committee found that such conduct was misleading and dishonest.

7. The Committee considered at the factual inquiry stage that Mrs Timmins was motivated by a desire to obtain the qualification in question, and that she in effect cheated to advance her own interests. The Committee also found that it was important that the documents that Mrs Timmins submitted were accurate so that an informed decision could ultimately be taken about awarding her the qualification in question. The Committee considered that misleading information of the sort dishonestly submitted by Mrs Timmins may have led to her being awarded a qualification to which she was not entitled. Given that the qualification related to the sedation of patients, this may have had consequences for safe and effective patient care.
8. The Committee considers that Mrs Timmins' conduct fell far short of the standards reasonably expected of a dental care professional. It finds that Mrs Timmins has breached a fundamental tenet of the profession, namely the need to act with honesty and integrity. Mrs Timmins' dishonest conduct represents a serious departure from acceptable standards of conduct and behaviour. In the Committee's view Mrs Timmins' actions are likely to have brought the standing and reputation of the profession into disrepute, and are also likely to have undermined public trust and confidence in the profession.
9. For these reasons, the Committee has determined that the facts that it has found proved amount to misconduct.

Impairment

10. The Committee then went on to consider whether Mrs Timmins' fitness to practise is currently impaired by reason of the misconduct that it has found. In doing so, the Committee has again exercised its own independent judgment. Throughout its deliberations, the Committee has borne in mind that its primary duty is to address the public interest, which includes the protection of patients, the maintenance of public confidence in the profession and in the regulatory process, and the declaring and upholding of proper standards of conduct and behaviour.
11. The Committee has determined that Mrs Timmins' fitness to practise is currently impaired. The Committee is mindful that dishonest conduct is likely to be highly damaging to a registrant's fitness to practise and may prove difficult for a registrant to remedy. In any event, Mrs Timmins has presented no information to suggest that she has developed insight into her misconduct, or indeed that she is minded to do so, beyond making some admissions when matters were put to her as part of her employer's disciplinary proceedings. There is similarly no evidence of Mrs Timmins having undertaken any remediation of her conduct.
12. The Committee is mindful that at the factual inquiry stage it found that misleading information of the sort dishonestly submitted by Mrs Timmins may have led to her being awarded a qualification to which she was not entitled. As noted above, this may well have had consequences for safe and effective patient care, and more particularly may have placed patients at unwarranted risk of harm. More broadly,

were Mrs Timmins to again place her own interests before those of patients through dishonest acts, the public may be placed at unwarranted risk of harm. With this in mind the Committee considers that Mrs Timmins continues to pose a risk to the public on account of her unremediated misconduct. In the Committee's view it cannot be said that a repetition of Mrs Timmins' dishonest conduct is highly unlikely. The Committee therefore finds that Mrs Timmins' fitness to practise is currently impaired.

13. The Committee also finds that a finding of impairment is undoubtedly required in order to declare and uphold proper standards of conduct and behaviour and to maintain trust and confidence in the profession as well as in the regulatory process. The Committee finds that Mrs Timmins' dishonest conduct has breached a fundamental tenet of the profession, namely the requirement to act with honesty and integrity, and that she has brought the reputation of the profession into disrepute. This is particularly the case given that the qualification which Mrs Timmins was seeking would, if awarded, have meant that she would have been able to undertake or assist with procedures which she was not properly trained and qualified to perform. In the Committee's judgment public trust and confidence in the profession would be significantly undermined if a finding of impairment were not made in the particular circumstances of this case.

Sanction

14. The Committee then determined what sanction, if any, would be appropriate in light of the findings of fact, misconduct and impairment that it has made. The Committee recognises that the purpose of a sanction is not to be punitive, although a sanction may have that effect, but is instead imposed in order to protect patients and safeguard the wider public interest referred to above.
15. In reaching its decision the Committee has again taken into account the GDC's *Guidance for the Practice Committees, including Indicative Sanctions Guidance* (October 2016, updated December 2020). The Committee has applied the principle of proportionality, balancing the public interest with Mrs Timmins' own interests.
16. The Committee has considered the aggravating and mitigating factors present in this case.
17. In relation to aggravating factors, the Committee considers that Mrs Timmins' dishonesty was premeditated, and relate to repeated acts of dishonesty, albeit in pursuit of the same qualification. As noted above, had Mrs Timmins been awarded the qualification in pursuit of which she made and submitted forged documents, patients may have been placed at the risk of harm because she would have gained a qualification to which she was not entitled. The Committee also considers that Mrs Timmins' abused her position of trust by forging the signatures of her colleagues.
18. In relation to mitigating factors, the Committee notes that Mrs Timmins is of previous good character, that she has no fitness to practise history, and that there

has been no reported repetition of matters which took place some time ago. Mrs Timmins made an apology to one of the colleagues whose signature she forged, namely Ms B. Mrs Timmins made some admissions during her employer's disciplinary proceedings.

IN PRIVATE

[text omitted]

IN PUBLIC

19. The Committee has considered the range of sanctions available to it, starting with the least restrictive. In the light of the findings made against Mrs Timmins, the Committee has determined that it would not be appropriate to conclude this case by taking no action or by issuing a reprimand. The Committee's findings mean that taking no action, or issuing a reprimand, would be insufficient to protect the public, would undermine public confidence and trust in the profession and in the regulatory process, and would not be sufficient to declare and uphold proper standards of conduct and behaviour.
20. The Committee next considered whether a period of conditional registration would be appropriate. The Committee determined that conditions cannot be formulated to deal with the concerns that it has identified, particularly given that Mrs Timmins has not engaged in these proceedings. There is a resulting lack of information about her ability and willingness to comply with conditions. In any event, even if conditions were capable of being formulated, the Committee considers that a direction of conditional registration would not be sufficient to meet the public interest considerations referred to above, and that its findings of repeated dishonest conduct cannot be satisfactorily addressed by conditions.
21. The Committee then went on to consider whether to suspend Mrs Timmins' registration. After careful consideration, the Committee determined that that a direction of suspended registration would not be sufficient to protect the public and the public interest considerations which are so engaged in this case. Mrs Timmins' repeated dishonest conduct represents a serious departure from the standards expected of a dental care professional. The Committee considers that Mrs Timmins continues to pose a risk of serious harm to the public. Her making and submission of forged documents has abused the trust placed in her by the colleagues whose signatures were forged, as well as of patients who were entitled to assume that she was acting in an honest manner. Mrs Timmins has not demonstrated any meaningful insight into her dishonesty and has not engaged in these proceedings.
22. Mrs Timmins' dishonest conduct is highly damaging to her fitness to practise and to public trust and confidence in the profession. Mrs Timmins' conduct is likely to have brought the reputation of the profession into disrepute. Any sanction less than erasure would not be sufficient to protect the public, mark the seriousness of her behaviour or declare and uphold proper professional standards of conduct and behaviour.

23. The Committee has determined, and hereby directs, that that Mrs Timmins' name be erased from the register.

Existing interim order

24. In accordance with Rule 21 (3) of the General Dental Council (Fitness to Practise) Rules 2006 and section 36P (10) of the Dentists Act 1984 (as amended) the extant interim order of suspension in place on Mrs Timmins' registration is hereby revoked.

Immediate order

25. Having directed that Mrs Timmins' name be erased from the register, the Committee invited submissions as to whether it should impose an order for her immediate suspension in accordance with section 36U (1) of the Dentists Act 1984 (as amended).
26. The Committee has heard the submissions of Mr Saad on behalf of the GDC that an order is necessary to protect the public and is otherwise in the public interest. The Committee has accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser.
27. In all the circumstances, the Committee considers that an immediate order of suspension is necessary to protect the public and is otherwise in the public interest. The Committee has decided that, given the risks that it has identified, it would not be appropriate to permit Mrs Timmins to practise before the substantive direction of erasure takes effect. An immediate order is needed to protect the public, to maintain trust and confidence in the profession and to declare and uphold proper standards of conduct and behaviour. The Committee considers that an immediate order for suspension is proportionate, and is consistent with the findings that it has set out in its determination.
28. The effect of the foregoing determination and this immediate order is that Mrs Timmins' registration will be suspended from the date on which notice of this decision is deemed served upon her. Unless Mrs Timmins exercises her right of appeal, the substantive direction of erasure will be recorded in the register 28 days from the date of deemed service. Should Mrs Timmins so decide to exercise her right of appeal, this immediate order of suspension will remain in place until the resolution of any appeal.
29. That concludes this case."

Schedule 1

Documents referred to an investigatory meeting attended by the Registrant on 10th March 2021 as:

- i) Appendix 4;

- ii) Appendix 5;
- iii) Appendix 6;
- iv) Appendix 7.

Schedule 2

Documents referred to an investigatory meeting attended by the Registrant, held on 10th March 2021, as:

- i) Appendix 8;
- ii) Appendix 9;
- iii) Appendix 10;
- iv) Appendix 11;
- v) Appendix 12;
- vi) Appendix 13;
- vii) Appendix 14;
- viii) Appendix 15.

Schedule 3

Documents referred to an investigatory meeting attended by the Registrant, held on 10th March 2021, as:

- i) Appendix 8;
- ii) Appendix 9;
- iii) Appendix 10;
- iv) Appendix 11;
- v) Appendix 12;
- vi) Appendix 13.