

Disciplinary Panel Meeting

Case of

**Mr John O'Grady MRICS [6400658]
Docklands, Australia**

On

Wednesday 19 September 2018

At RICS, 55 Colmore Row, Birmingham, B3 2AS

Panel

Helen Riley (Surveyor Chair)
Patrick Bligh – Cheesman (Lay Member)
Sue Heads (Lay Member)

Legal Assessor

Peter Steel

The formal charge is:

Between 1 January 2017 and 1 February 2018 you have failed to comply with RICS' requirements in respect of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in that you have not completed and recorded, or caused to be recorded, at least 20 hours of CPD on the RICS CPD portal.

Contrary to Rule 6 of the Rules of Conduct for Members 2007 version 6.

Response

1. Mr O'Grady had responded to the Notice of Hearing dated 21 August 2018 by an email dated 14 September 2018. He did not address the charge in his email. The Panel therefore proceeded on the basis that the charge was not admitted.

Summary

2. From January 2013 RICS members were obliged to complete 20 hours CPD activity by 31 December of each calendar year.
3. Rule 6 provides: “Members shall comply with RICS requirements in respect of continuing professional development.”
4. CPD requirements for members are: –
 - Members must complete at least 20 hours CPD, of which at least 10 hours must be formal CPD.
 - All members must maintain a relevant and current understanding of RICS’ professional and ethical standards during a rolling three-year period.
 - All members must record the CPD activity online.
5. For the CPD year 2017 correspondence was sent by email to members reminding them about the necessity to comply with their CPD obligations. RICS wrote to Mr O’Grady’s registered address on 9 March 2017 informing him of the Fixed Penalty which had been issued to him for CPD non-compliance in 2016. This letter stated: “*If you fail to comply with CPD requirements in 2017, you will be referred to a Disciplinary Panel*”. Mr O’Grady was also sent a number of emailed reminders as a result of missing the 31 January 2018 deadline for recording his CPD. These too made it explicit that he risked a sanction unless he took immediate action.

Service

6. A Notice of Hearing, together with the evidence bundle was sent under cover of 5 separate emails to Mr O’Grady’s preferred email address held by RICS on 21 August 2018. A copy of the emails and electronic delivery receipt for them had been produced to the Panel. Mr O’Grady’s email of 14 September 2018 suggested that he had in fact received the Notice of Hearing. The Panel was accordingly satisfied that Notice had been properly served in accordance with Rule 43a. Having considered the circumstances, the Panel was content that it was fair and in the public interest for it to proceed to consider the case.
7. Mr O’Grady had been advised of his right to an oral hearing in the Notice of Hearing in accordance with Rule 23 but had not requested such a hearing.

Findings of Fact

8. The Panel was provided with a statement from Joe Poole, CPD Administrator at RICS dated 27 June 2018 setting out Mr O'Grady's online CPD record and exhibiting the relevant records. This showed that he had not recorded any CPD for 2017 and he had not been granted any concessions for that year.
9. Accordingly the Panel found the factual allegations proved, on the basis of the documentary evidence produced.

Liability to Disciplinary Action

10. The Panel was satisfied that the RICS requirement to complete and record CPD is reasonable and that Mr O'Grady's failure to comply with those requirements is sufficiently serious to give rise to a liability for disciplinary action. In reaching this conclusion the Panel took into account the fact that the CPD policy has been approved by the Regulatory Board and is an expressly stated RICS rule. The Panel noted that all members agree to adhere to the RICS Rules, Regulations and Bye-Laws and accept that they may be subject to disciplinary action if they fail to do so. The Panel was also satisfied that breaches of the RICS rule on CPD recording must be regarded as serious as they prevent RICS from monitoring compliance and thus ensuring public protection.
11. Accordingly, the Panel was satisfied that Mr O'Grady was liable to disciplinary action.

Sanction

Panel's Approach

12. The Panel took into account the submissions of RICS as set out in the Case Summary in the bundle. It had regard to the RICS Sanctions Policy.
13. The Panel bore in mind that the purpose of sanctions is not to be punitive, although it may have that effect. The purpose of sanctions is to declare and uphold the standards of the profession, to safeguard the reputation of the profession and of RICS as its regulator and to protect the public. Sanctions must be proportionate to the breach and all the circumstances and a decision should be reached having taken into account any mitigating and/or aggravating factors.
14. The Panel bundle contained a further statement from Joe Poole dated 27 June 2018 which indicated that Mr O'Grady had received a Caution for failure to comply with the CPD requirements in 2014 and a Caution and Fine in 2016 for a further breach. This was therefore Mr O'Grady's third such breach.

Decision

15. Mr O'Grady had replied to an email from RICS on 14 September 2018 as follows:
"*...Please stop this course of action. It is a waste of your time and mine.*"

My employer no longer pays for mine or others in Opteon in regard to annual fees.

I voluntary [sic] resign from RICS.

Please expunge my name from all RICS records.

I apologise if I have caused any inconvenience.”

16. The Panel could not therefore identify any particular mitigation for his failure to record any CPD for 2017, though it gave Mr O’Grady some limited credit for getting in touch and for his apology. It noted that other than the previous Fixed Penalties, he had no disciplinary history with RICS and that he had fulfilled the CPD requirement in 2013 and 2015.
17. The Panel considered that the following aggravating factors were present in this case:
 - The charge found proved represented a repeated breach of the CPD requirements.
 - It appeared from his email of 14 September 2018 that Mr O’Grady had no intention of complying, which suggested he had little insight into the importance of the CPD requirements in assuring the public that RICS’ members remained competent to practise.
 - He had been sent a number of prompts by email and letter that he risked disciplinary action if he did not comply which he had apparently ignored until shortly before this meeting.
18. RICS is a professional membership organisation and sets standards for its members as a condition of membership. It is not difficult to record CPD online however busy a member’s professional or personal life may be. Compliance is not optional.
19. The Panel first considered whether it was appropriate to impose any sanction at all. The Panel concluded that the repeated failure to record CPD was serious and, in the absence of exceptional circumstances, imposing no sanction would be neither proportionate nor appropriate. As noted above, he should have been aware of his responsibility to ensure that he complied with his CPD obligations. In addition the Panel noted that Mr O’Grady had been sent numerous reminders by RICS.
20. The Panel went on to consider whether to impose a caution. The Panel concluded that a caution would not adequately reflect the seriousness of the case, recognising the cumulative pattern of non-compliance and the fact that Mr O’Grady had already received two Fixed Penalties for previous breaches. The Panel also considered the imposition of a reprimand, but concluded that similarly this did not reflect the seriousness of Mr O’Grady’s repeated failure to comply with the requirement to complete and record CPD on the RICS portal.

21. In considering whether to require Mr O’Grady to give an undertaking the Panel took into account the mandatory nature of the CPD requirements and the fact that he had firmly indicated that he did not intend to comply in the future. The Panel noted that the CPD requirements are designed to ensure that the skills and knowledge of RICS members are kept up to date and ultimately to ensure public protection. The Panel concluded that it would not be appropriate or proportionate, in the absence of exceptional circumstances, to impose an undertaking given that Mr O’Grady should have been completing and recording his CPD online in any event. Even if an undertaking were to be combined with either a caution, reprimand or fine, the Panel concluded that imposing such a sanction would be insufficient to maintain public trust and confidence in the regulatory process.
22. The Panel then considered whether to impose a fine. It decided that a fine would not be an appropriate sanction. He had previously received a fine for a breach of the CPD requirements but this had clearly not served as an adequate warning. Mr O’Grady’s repeated failure to abide by his professional responsibilities was simply unacceptable for someone who wished to remain part of a respected profession.
23. For similar reasons, the Panel considered and dismissed the imposition of a condition on Mr O’Grady’s continuing membership as an adequate response to the misconduct demonstrated by this case. It also noted that Mr O’Grady was required to complete and record CPD in any event. As indicated above, he had expressed his wish to resign from membership. It was therefore not clear what purpose it might serve to impose a condition relating to his future completion of CPD in the circumstances.
24. The Panel took into account paragraph 21.1. of the Sanctions Policy, which states that expulsion is likely where there is a third breach of Rule 6 of the Rules of Conduct for members within 10 years of a receipt of a caution for breach of the same rule. In the absence of any response explaining Mr O’Grady’s failure to complete and/or record CPD in 2017, the Panel considered there was no good reason in this case to depart from the Sanctions Policy. Having carefully considered all facets of the case, the Panel concluded that the only appropriate sanction in this case was expulsion. It therefore ordered that Mr O’Grady be expelled from membership of RICS.

Publication

25. The Panel has considered the policy on publication of decisions, The Sanctions Policy Supplement 3 - Publication of Regulatory Disciplinary Matters. The Panel was unable to identify any reason to depart from the presumption that decisions will be published on the RICS website and in the RICS magazine Modus.

Costs

26. RICS applied for costs of \$694.29 (i.e. the sum of £400 in Australian dollars at the exchange rate effective on 10 August 2018).
27. The Panel considered carefully the issue of costs. The costs figure represents a contribution towards the costs incurred by RICS in preparation for the hearing and the hearing itself. The Panel had no reason to doubt that the costs application was fair and reasonable.
28. The Panel concluded that it was appropriate for Mr O'Grady to make a contribution towards the costs of bringing this case, otherwise the full cost of these proceedings would fall on the profession as a whole.
29. The Panel orders that Mr O'Grady pays to RICS costs in the sum of \$694.29.

Appeal Period

30. Mr O'Grady has 28 days, from the service of the notification of the decision, to appeal this decision in accordance with Rule 59 of the Rules.
31. In accordance with Rule 60 of the Disciplinary, Registration and Appeal Panel Rules, the Honorary Secretary of RICS has 28 days, from the service of the notification of the decision, to require a review of this Decision.