

Disciplinary Panel Hearing

Case of

**Mr Christopher Robinson MRICS [1130839]
Hampshire, RG19**

On

Tuesday 5 November 2019

By Telephone conference

Panel

Sally Ruthen (Lay Chair)
Catherine Brown (Lay Member)
Paul Watkinson (Surveyor Member)

Legal Assessor

Chris Hamlet

RICS Representative

This was a paper hearing, with written representations prepared on behalf of RICS.

The formal charge is:

The charge against Mr Robinson is:

‘Between 1 January 2018 and 1 February 2019 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.’

Mr Robinson is therefore liable to disciplinary action under Bye-law 5.2.2.

Notice/Proceeding in Absence:

1. Mr Robinson was given notice by Special Delivery and email on 6 September 2019 that this case was to proceed by way of written representations ie: a paper hearing, in accordance with Rules 4d and 43a of the Disciplinary, Registration and Appeal Panel Rules version 7 (the “Rules”).
2. The Panel received advice from the Legal Assessor as to the Rules regarding service in respect of paper hearings. It concluded Notice had been properly served in accordance with R43a(a).
3. The Panel next considered whether to proceed in the absence of Mr Robinson. The Legal Assessor’s advice was sought and accepted. The Panel was referred to the case of R-v-Jones [2002] UKHL 5, which Tait v The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) [2003] UKPC 34 states is also applicable to professional conduct proceedings. The Panel was further referred to the case of GMC v Adeogba and GMC v Visvardis [2016] EWCA Civ 162, in which the Court of Appeal ruled that the regulator’s responsibility was to communicate the Notice of Hearing to the address provided by the Registrant and no more.
4. The Panel in this case took account of the fact, confirmed by the statement of Mrs Emma Jones, Regulatory Tribunal Executive, dated 30 October 2019, that Mr Robinson had been emailed and served by post the Notice and bundle of evidence in accordance with the Rules, to his preferred email and postal address as notified to RICS. The Panel noted that a delivery receipt had been generated in respect of the postal notice and that an emailed notice was re-sent to his business address on 4 October, which was successfully delivered. It further noted that RICS had attempted to contact Mr Robinson by telephone and left a voicemail, but no response had been received.
5. The Panel considered it was appropriate and in the public interest to proceed in Mr Robinson’s absence.

Evidence:

6. The Panel received a bundle containing material relevant to each stage of the proceedings. On advice from the Legal Assessor, the Panel initially took account of the material only insofar as it was relevant to its decision on the charge and liability to disciplinary action. This included a Case Summary produced on behalf of RICS and a statement from Mr Joe Poole, RICS CPD administrator, dated 6 August 2019 (of which account was taken only in respect of the failure to record any CPD for the year 2018).

Burden and standard of proof:

7. RICS is required to prove the allegations to the civil standard; that it is more likely than not that any event material to those allegations occurred. That is a single unwavering standard of proof, though the more unlikely an allegation the more careful an examination of the evidence might be required before a Panel find it proved. There is no requirement for Mr Robinson to prove anything.
8. The Panel had in mind throughout its deliberations that the right to practise a profession is involved in these proceedings and proceeded upon the basis that the Human Rights Act

1998 will apply. It bore in mind in particular Mr Robinson's right to a fair trial and respect for his private and family life under Articles 6 and 8 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, as incorporated within UK law by that Act. The question of whether or not any facts admitted or found proved gave rise to liability to disciplinary action was a matter for the Panel's judgment.

Facts:

9. The Panel had regard to the evidence produced that Mr Robinson, as a matter of fact, had not completed and recorded any CPD between 1 January 2018 and 1 February 2019. That evidence comprised a print out of Mr Robinson's CPD record and the statement produced on behalf of RICS referred to above.
10. It was noted that there is no evidence that Mr Robinson has applied for any RICS Exemption or Concession for that year which would have allowed him to avoid that requirement.
11. The Panel concluded that as a matter of fact the charge was made out.

Liability to Disciplinary action:

12. The Panel went on to consider whether Mr Robinson was liable to disciplinary action. In coming to its conclusion the Panel accepted the advice of the Legal Assessor. This question is one for the Panel's judgment. The Panel considered that failure to carry out a condition of membership which is there to ensure members retain current knowledge and skills, is serious.
13. Mr Robinson had not responded to the RICS correspondence in respect of this issue.
14. The Panel took into account the fact that the CPD policy was 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. It considered the failure to record any CPD at all represented a serious falling short of Mr Robinson's professional obligations.
15. It concluded that Mr Robinson was liable to disciplinary action.

Sanction:

16. Having found the charge proved and determined that Mr Robinson was liable to disciplinary action, the Panel referred to the written submissions on behalf of RICS regarding prior breaches of CPD obligations in 2016 and 2017 for which he received a Caution and a Caution and a Fine, respectively.
17. In addition, the Panel took account of statements from Ms Hayley Moore, Business Improvement and Performance Team Manager at RICS, confirming the mailings sent to Mr Robinson about his CPD obligations, including postal reminders of the consequences of a further breach.

18. The Panel further took account of the fact, confirmed in an additional statement from Mr Joe Poole, that Mr Robinson has paid the fine for the 2017 breach and has paid membership fees for 2017 and 2018.
19. The Panel bore in mind that the purpose of sanctions is not to be punitive, though that may be their 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 matters found proved.
20. The Panel paid careful heed to the advice of the Legal Assessor and to the Sanctions Policy of RICS. It considered carefully the mitigating and aggravating factors of this case.
21. The Panel was advised that in determining what, if any sanction to impose on Mr Robinson, Rule 21.1 of the Sanctions Policy provides for a presumption of expulsion in the event of a third breach of CPD obligations within 10 years. However, this presumption is capable of being displaced if the circumstances permitted. The advice, in keeping with the approach of other regulators, was that any sanction imposed must be proportionate, and therefore ought to involve consideration of the lowest sanctions available first and only moving to the next level of sanction if it decides the lesser sanction is inappropriate or otherwise fails to meet the public interest. The Panel bore in mind that more than one sanction may be imposed. If conditions are to be imposed they must be proportionate, workable and address the issues raised in these proceedings.

Mitigating/Aggravating features:

22. The Panel took account of the fact that Mr Robinson has not contacted RICS or engaged with these proceedings at all.
23. The following features of the case were considered to aggravate the breach:
 - Prior cautions for similar breaches in 2016 and 2017
 - Receipt of a fine for the 2017 breach
 - Lack of engagement in the proceedings
24. The Panel considered there were no mitigating features present in this case.

Decision on Sanction:

25. The Panel considered the matter too serious for no sanction to be imposed. It took account of the guidance at paragraph 21 of the Sanctions Policy which provides that a third breach of Rules regarding CPD within 10 years of receipt of a caution raises a presumption of expulsion.
26. The Panel considered the range of sanctions available to it under Rule 44 of the Rules but concluded that in light of the absence of any mitigating features, the presumption of expulsion under paragraph 21 of the Sanctions Policy should apply in this case.
27. Accordingly, the Panel ordered Mr Robinson be expelled from membership.

Publication

28. The Panel considered the guidance as to publication of its decisions. It accepted the Legal Assessor's advice. The advice was, and the guidance provides, that it is usual for the decisions of the Panel to be published on RICS' website and in RICS Modus. The Panel saw no reason for departing from the normal practice in this case.
29. The Panel ordered that this decision be published on RICS' website and in RICS Modus, in accordance with Supplement 3 to the Sanctions Policy 2008 version 6.

Costs

30. RICS made an application for costs in the sum of £400. The Panel acceded to that application in order that the costs of the hearing are not borne by the profession.

Appeal Period

31. Mr Robinson may appeal to an Appeal Panel against this decision within 28 days of notification of this decision, in accordance with Rules 58 – 70 of the Disciplinary, Registration and Appeal Panel Rules 2009 version 7.
32. The Honorary Secretary of RICS may require a review of a finding or penalty imposed by a Disciplinary Panel within 28 days from service of the notification of the decision, in accordance with Rule 59 of the Disciplinary, Registration and Appeal Panel Rules 2009 version 7.