

Disciplinary Panel Hearing

Case of

Mr Michel Van Geyte MRICS [1291915]

Belgium

On

Thursday 24 October 2019

At

By Telephone conference

Panel

Gillian Seager (Lay Chair)
Jane Bishop (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 Van Geyte 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 Van Geyte is therefore liable to disciplinary action under Bye-law 5.2.2.

Notice/Proceeding in Absence:

1. Mr Van Geyte was given notice by International Special Delivery and email on 15 August 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 Van Geyte. 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 17 October 2019, that Mr Van Geyte 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. Postal delivery was successful and a read receipt was provided in respect of the email.
5. The Panel further took account of the Listing Questionnaire completed by Mr Van Geyte in which he indicated he did not wish to have an oral hearing. He set out within that document and by reference to prior correspondence, some written submissions which the Panel took to be intended to be taken into account in lieu of his attendance.
6. The Panel duly concluded it was appropriate and in the public interest to proceed in his absence.

Evidence:

7. 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 20 May 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:

8. 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 Van Geyte to prove anything.
9. The Panel has in mind throughout its deliberations that the right to practise a profession is involved in these proceedings and proceeds upon the basis that the Human Rights Act 1998 will apply. It bears in mind in particular Mr Van Geyte’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 is a matter for the Panel's judgment.

Facts:

10. The Panel had regard to the evidence produced that Mr Van Geyte, as a matter of fact, had completed and recorded only 5 hours of CPD between 1 January 2018 and 1 February 2019. That evidence comprised a print out of Mr Van Geyte's CPD record and the statement produced on behalf of RICS referred to above.
11. It was noted that there is no evidence that Mr Van Geyte has applied for any RICS Exemption or Concession which would have allowed him to avoid that requirement.
12. The Panel concluded that as a matter of fact the charge was made out.

Liability to Disciplinary action:

13. The Panel went on to consider whether Mr Van Geyte 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.
14. Mr Van Geyte, in his Listing Questionnaire, denied he was liable to disciplinary action. He referred to prior correspondence regarding activities he has undertaken over the relevant period. However, he accepts that he has not recorded CPD "due to lack of time and too little attention..."
15. The Panel observed that this failure prevents RICS from monitoring his compliance with his professional obligations and tends to undermine public confidence in the profession.
16. 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.
17. It concluded that Mr Van Geyte was liable to disciplinary action.

Sanction:

18. Having found the charge proved and determined that Mr Van Geyte was liable to disciplinary action, the Panel referred to the written submissions on behalf of RICS regarding prior breaches of CPD obligations in 2013 and 2014 for which he received a Caution and a Caution and a Fine, respectively.
19. 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 Van Geyte about his CPD obligations, including a postal reminder of the consequences of a further breach.

20. The Panel further took account of the fact, confirmed in an additional statement from Mr Joe Poole, that Mr Van Geyte has not paid the fine for the 2014 breach and has paid membership fees for 2017, 2018 and 2019.
21. 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.
22. The Panel paid careful heed to the advice of the Legal Assessor and to the indicative sanctions guidance of RICS. It considered carefully the mitigating and aggravating factors of this case.
23. The Panel was advised that in determining what, if any sanction to impose on Mr Van Geyte, 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:

24. The Panel took account of the fact that Mr Van Geyte has sought to provide an explanation to RICS for the breach, being that he failed to “pay enough attention to the update of the CPD portal due to lack of time and too little attention”. It noted he had apologised and stated “I will make sure that the RICS CPD portal is updated every three months and that the deadline is pursued in the future.”
25. The Panel further observed that Mr Van Geyte appeared to have undertaken qualifying CPD activities in 2018 but had failed to record it, despite doing so in 2016 and 2017.
26. The following features of the case were considered to aggravate the breach:
 - Prior cautions for similar breaches in 2013 and 2014
 - Receipt of a fine for the 2014 breach
 - Failure to pay the 2014 fine
27. The following features of the case were considered to mitigate the breach:
 - He has acknowledged the breach
 - He appears to have undertaken appropriate CPD in 2018, but not recorded it
 - He has undertaken to address the issue in future

Decision on Sanction:

28. 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.

29. The Panel considered that in light of the mitigating features of the case, the presumption of expulsion should not apply in this case. The Panel considered Mr Van Geyte should have a final opportunity to comply with his CPD recording before that presumption should apply.

30. Accordingly, the Panel ordered Mr Van Geyte be subject to the following Condition:

“You will comply with RICS’ requirements in respect of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for the period 1 January 2019 to 31 December 2019 by completing and recording, or causing to be recorded, at least 20 hours of CPD, of which at least 10 hours must be formal, on the RICS CPD Portal by 31 January 2020.”

31. Failure to comply with this condition will result in Mr Van Geyte’s automatic expulsion.

32. In addition, the Panel ordered Mr Van Geyte pay a fine for his non-compliance of £1000.

Publication

33. 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 sees no reason for departing from the normal practice in this case.

34. The Panel orders 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

35. 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

36. Mr Van Geyte 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.

37. 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.

