

RICS, Disciplinary, Registration and Appeal Panel Rules 2019

Part VI, Regulatory Tribunal Single member decision

Regulated Member	Alan Benson [1198708]
Case Number	TRIB-004903
Single Member Decision of	Nick Hawkins
Date of decision	9th December 2022

CHARGE

The formal charge against the Regulated Member is: -

Between 1 January 2021 and 1 February 2022, you have failed to comply with RICS' requirements in regard 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. An extension was granted by RICS until 26 May 2022 by which date you had still failed to complete and record or cause to be recorded, at least 20 hours of CPD on the RICS CPD portal for the period between 1 January 2021 and 1 February 2022

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

The Regulated Member is therefore liable to disciplinary action under Bye-law 5.2.2(c)

BACKGROUND

1. RICS members are required to complete 20 hours of CPD activity by 31 December of each calendar year and record or cause it to be recorded.
2. Rule 6 of the Rules of Conduct for Members 2007 states: **Members shall comply with RICS requirements in respect of continuing professional development**
3. The requirements of the Rule are as follows
 - (i) All RICS members must undertake a minimum of 20 hours CPD each calendar year January to December
 - (ii) Of the 20 hours at least 10 hours must be formal CPD. The remainder can be informal CPD.

- (iii) All RICS members must maintain a relevant and current understanding of RICS professional and ethical standards during a rolling three year. Any learning undertaken in order to meet this requirement may count as formal CPD.
 - (iv) All members must record their CPD activity online by 31 January.
4. The CPD requirements confirm that for a first breach of this rule the member would receive a Fixed Penalty Caution which will remain on the member's disciplinary record for a period of 10 years. A second breach will result in a further Caution and a Fixed Penalty Fine of 150 or equivalent. Non-payment of the fixed penalty within 28 days of notification will lead to the fine being increased to £250 pounds. A third CPD breach is likely to result in a referral to disciplinary proceedings.

FINDINGS OF FACT

5. Before considering any evidence, I reminded myself of the burden and standard of proof in these proceedings. The burden of proving the charges rests with RICS throughout. The standard of proof is the civil standard, normally described as the balance of probabilities. Another way of expressing this is to ask whether a fact in issue is more likely than not to have occurred.
6. I have been provided with a bundle of 67 pages which include a CPD print out from RICS' online system for the member and some email correspondence between the member and the investigator.
7. I have considered the statement of Jamie Edwards, the investigator. Mr Benson's CPD record for the years 2013 to 2021 is set out at paragraph 6 of that statement. No hours are recorded for 2015, 2018 and 2021. At least 20 hours are recorded each other year in this period. 35 hours were recorded in 2019 and 75.5 hours were recorded in 2020.
8. I am satisfied that the member did not have any relevant concessions for 2020 as none are recorded by RICS.
9. I have also considered the statement of Claire Hoverd who explains how RICS communicates with members reminding them of their CPD requirements. She confirms that Mr Benson would have received reminders on eight occasions between November 2021 and June 2022. On each occasion the message was sent by email and on three or these occasions a hard copy was also sent.

10. I have not been provided with any other evidence or representations from Mr Benson.
11. I am satisfied that Mr Benson was fully aware of the requirement to complete 20 hours CPD in the calendar year 2021. I have no explanation as to why no CPD hours were recorded and I have no evidence that any CPD hours were in fact completed as no details have been provided by Mr Benson. I therefore find as a matter of fact that Mr Benson has failed to comply with the CPD requirements, and the formal charge is proved.

DECISION AS TO LIABILITY FOR DISCIPLINARY ACTION

12. I am satisfied that the RICS requirement to complete and record CPD is reasonable and that the members failure to comply with these requirements is sufficiently serious to give rise to a liability for disciplinary action. In reaching this conclusion I take into account the fact that the CPD policy have been approved by the Regulatory Board and is an expressly stated RICS rule. In addition, the Sanctions Policy makes it clear that even a single breach of CPD requirements is sufficient to give rise to a liability for disciplinary action. I note that the purpose of the CPD requirements is to ensure that there are consistent standards within the profession and that members maintain up to date knowledge in their area of expertise in the interests of protecting the public and the wider public interest. I also note that all members agree to adhere to the RICS Rules, Regulations and Bye-Laws and accept that they may be subject disciplinary action if they fail to do so. I am satisfied that Mr Benson was given every opportunity to comply with the CPD requirements, particularly as the time limit for recording CPS hours was extended until 26 May 2022.
13. Accordingly, I am satisfied that Mr Benson is liable to disciplinary action.

SANCTION

14. I note that, in addition the failure to complete CPD hours in 2021, no CPD hours were recorded by Mr Benson in 2015 and 2018. I note however, that CPD hours were recorded by the member in other years.

15. I take into account the RICS Sanctions Policy and Mr Benson's disciplinary history which is as follows:

- a. 2015 - Caution
- b. 2018 - Caution and Fine

16. The bundle documents suggest that Mr Benson has not paid his fine for 18, despite being sent a reminder. He has however, paid his membership fees in 2021.

17. I note from the bundle that numerous reminders were sent to Mr Benson's preferred email addresses. I am satisfied that the reminders were correctly addressed to the preferred address then held on file for the Regulated Member and note that RICS received an "out of office" message from Mr Benson on 28 October 2022.

18. I am therefore satisfied that the Mr Benson was aware of his CPD responsibilities.

19. RICS is a professional membership organisation and set standards for its members as a condition of membership. The completion and recording of CPD is an essential part of membership and provides protection to the public and ensures that professional standards are maintained. The overwhelming majority of RICS members complete and record at least 20 hours CPD each year. It is not unreasonable for RICS to impose sanctions on those members who do not do so.

20. I bear 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 have been taken into account any mitigating and/or aggravating factors.

21. I have not been provided with any mitigation by or on behalf of Mr Benson.

22. I consider that the following aggravating factors are present in case:

- there has been no engagement in the CPD process nor in the investigation process from the member despite frequent reminders
- Mr Benson has been a member since 2013 and clearly understands the process of recording CPD as hours were successfully recorded in other years
- this is his third breach of the regulation in a period of 8 years

23. I first considered whether to impose any sanction at all. This is a third breach of CPD requirements, and I conclude that imposing no sanction would be neither proportionate nor appropriate.
24. I went on to consider whether to impose a caution. I concluded that a caution would not adequately reflect the seriousness of this case given that this is a third offence and noting that two cautions have already been imposed for previous breaches. I also considered the imposition of a reprimand but similarly concluded that this would not reflect the seriousness of Mr Benson repeated failures.
25. I considered whether to impose an undertaking and noted the mandatory nature of the CPD requirements. I do not consider it would be appropriate or proportionate to impose an undertaking on a member that merely sets out his professional obligations. Further I conclude that imposing such a sanction would undermine public trust and confidence in the regulatory process.
26. I then considered whether to impose a fine. I note that a fine was imposed on Mr Benson for failing to record his CPD hours for the year 2018. I conclude that it would not be appropriate to impose a further financial penalty as the last one had not resulted in compliance with the CPD requirements. Indeed, a further fine could, and in my view would, undermine the need to uphold the standards expected of all members and would undermine the deterrent effect on other members of the profession.
27. I went on to consider conditions. It is my view that it would not be possible to formulate conditions that would be realistic or achievable as any conditions would merely set out the requirements for members to comply with CPD regulations. Conditions are not likely to be appropriate for breaches of CPD requirements.
28. Having considered all sanctions short of expulsion and determined that none would meet the wider public interest, I have considered expulsion. I recognise that expulsion is the ultimate sanction and should be reserved for those categories of cases where there is no other means of protecting the public or the wider public interest. I am satisfied that a case of repeated failures to complete and record CPD hours is such a case. Mr Benson has repeatedly failed to comply with the CPD requirements of the profession, and he has not engaged with the investigation and subsequent disciplinary process. The evidence before me is that Mr Benson has committed a third breach of CPD requirements. I consider that there is no sanction other than dismissal that is both proportionate and appropriate in this case and determine that Mr Benson should be expelled from RICS.

29. In reaching my conclusion I have carefully balanced the wider public interest against the interests of Mr Benson and his professional standing. Whilst recognising that expulsion may have a major impact on Mr Benson, I consider that the interests of the public and the profession far outweigh the interests of the member in this case. Finally, I have found no reason to go against the presumption in 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 receipt of a caution for breach of the same rules.

DECISION

30. Having read the papers and considered the evidence, in accordance with Part VI of the Disciplinary Registration and Appeals Panels Rules, I make the following order:

That Mr Benson shall be expelled from membership of the RICS

COSTS

31. In accordance with rule 119 of the DRAP Rules 2019 I make the following order in respect of costs:

Mr Benson will pay costs in the amount of £350

Taking Effect of the Order

32. In accordance with Rule 119 of the Disciplinary Registration and Appeal Panels Rules

114 Following the expiry of 14 days from the service of the record of the Single Member's decision upon the Regulated Member, the Regulatory Sanction will be deemed to be excepted by the Regulated Member and the Regulatory Sanction imposed will take effect forthwith, unless notification has been received under Rule 116

The regulated member must notify the Head of Regulatory Governance and Tribunals within 14 days of receipt of this decision, if he does not accept this decision, failing which the order will be deemed accepted by the Regulated Member and will take effect.

Publication

33. This decision will be published in accordance with Rule 120 of the Disciplinary Registration and Appeal Panel Rules, which states the following:

- 120. in accordance with the regulatory sanctions publication policy*
- a. pending the expiry of 14 days following service of the record of decision upon the parties, the Regulated Member's name, charge/s and Single Member's decision as to whether the charge/s were found proved or not proved, and Regulatory Sanction if applicable will be published in accordance with the Regulatory Sanctions Policy and*
 - b. the Single Member's recorded decision will be published following the expiry of 14 days.*