

Before the Building Practitioners Board

	BPB Complaint No. C2-01632
Licensed Building Practitioner:	Christoffel Du Plessis (the Respondent)
Licence Number:	BP 115462
Licence(s) Held:	Carpentry

Decision of the Board in Respect of the Conduct of a Licensed Building Practitioner Under section 315 of the Building Act 2004

Complaint or Board Inquiry	Complaint
Hearing Location	Christchurch
Hearing Type:	On the Papers
Hearing Date:	22 August 2017
Decision Date:	15 September 17
Board Members Present	Chris Preston (Presiding) Mel Orange Brian Nightingale Robin Dunlop

Procedure:

The matter was considered by the Building Practitioners Board (the Board) under the provisions of Part 4 of the Building Act 2004 (the Act), the Building Practitioners (Complaints and Disciplinary Procedures) Regulations 2008 (the Complaints Regulations) and the Board's Complaints and Inquiry Procedures.

Board Decision:

The Respondent **has** committed a disciplinary offence under section 317(1)(da)(ii) of the Act.

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Introduction

- [1] The hearing resulted from a Complaint into the conduct of the Respondent and a Board resolution under regulation 10 of the Complaints Regulations¹ to hold a hearing in relation to building work at [Omitted]. The alleged disciplinary offences the Board resolved to investigate were that the Respondent has failed, without good reason, in respect of a building consent that relates to restricted building work that he or she is to carry out (other than as an owner-builder) or supervise, or has carried out (other than as an owner-builder) or supervised, (as the case may be), to provide the persons specified in section 88(2) with a record of work, on completion of the restricted building work, in accordance with section 88(1) (s 317(1)(da)(ii) of the Act).

Function of Disciplinary Action

- [2] The common understanding of the purpose of professional discipline is to uphold the integrity of the profession. The focus is not punishment, but the protection of the public, the maintenance of public confidence and the enforcement of high standards of propriety and professional conduct. Those purposes were recently reiterated by the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom in *R v Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales*² and in New Zealand in *Dentice v Valuers Registration Board*³.

¹ The resolution was made following the Board’s consideration of a report prepared by the Registrar in accordance with the Complaints Regulations.

² *R v Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales* [2011] UKSC 1, 19 January 2011.

³ [1992] 1 NZLR 720 at p 724

- [3] Disciplinary action under the Act is not designed to redress issues or disputes between a complainant and a Respondent. In *McLanahan and Tan v The New Zealand Registered Architects Board*⁴ Collins J. noted that:

“... the disciplinary process does not exist to appease those who are dissatisfied with their architect. The disciplinary process for architects exists to ensure professional standards are maintained in order to protect clients, the profession and the broader community.”

- [4] The Board can only inquire into “the conduct of a licensed building practitioner” with respect to the grounds for discipline set out in section 317 of the Act. It does not have any jurisdiction over contractual matters.

Background to the Complaint

- [5] The allegation was that the Respondent failed to provide a record of work on completion of restricted building work.

Evidence

- [6] The Board must be satisfied on the balance of probabilities that the disciplinary offences alleged have been committed⁵. Under section 322 of the Act the Board has relaxed rules of evidence which allow it to receive evidence that may not be admissible in a court of law.
- [7] The Respondent undertook an alteration to the Complainant’s home under a building consent. The building work included restricted building work. The Complainant stated that the building work was completed on 27 September 2016 but a record of work has not been provided. He further stated that the Respondent, by way of emails dated 21 and 25 January 2017, refused to provide them until his invoices were paid. The Complainant noted that there was a dispute that was being dealt with in the courts.
- [8] The Respondent, in his response to the complaint, set out some of the background to a dispute between them. He also put forward what he considered were good reasons for not providing a record of work. He stated that he had taken advice from Master Builders and his own legal adviser and was told that the correct thing to do was to cease all work until the situation has been resolved. He also noted that payments need to be made in respect of other items such as producer statements and implied the same should apply to records of work.

Board’s Conclusion and Reasoning

- [9] The Board has decided that the Respondent **has** failed, without good reason, in respect of a building consent that relates to restricted building work that he or she is to carry out (other than as an owner-builder) or supervise, or has carried out (other than as an owner-builder) or supervised, (as the case may be), to provide the

⁴ [2016] HZHC 2276 at para 164

⁵ *Z v Dental Complaints Assessment Committee* [2009] 1 NZLR 1

persons specified in section 88(2) with a record of work, on completion of the restricted building work, in accordance with section 88(1) (s 317(1)(da)(ii) of the Act) and should be disciplined.

- [10] There is a statutory requirement under section 88(1) of the Building Act 2004 for a licensed building practitioner to provide a record of work to the owner and the territorial authority on completion of restricted building work.
- [11] Failing to provide a record of work is a ground for discipline under section 317(1)(da)(ii) of the Act. In order to find that ground for discipline proven, the Board need only consider whether the Respondent had “good reason” for not providing a record of work on “completion” of the restricted building work.
- [12] The Board discussed issues with regard to records of work in its decision C2-01170 and gave guidelines to the profession as to who must provide a record of work, what a record of work is for, when it is to be provided, the level of detail that must be provided, who a record of work must be provided to and what might constitute a good reason for not providing a record of work.
- [13] The starting point with a record of work is that it is a mandatory statutory requirement whenever restricted building work under a building consent is carried out or supervised by a licensed building practitioner (other than as an owner-builder). Each and every licensed building practitioner who carries out restricted building work must provide a record of work.
- [14] The statutory provisions do not stipulate a timeframe for the licenced person to provide a record of work. The provisions in section 88(1) simply states “on completion of the restricted building work ...”.
- [15] In most situations issues with the provision of a record of work do not arise. The work progresses and records of work are provided in a timely fashion. Contractual disputes or intervening events can, however, lead to situations where the licensed building practitioner will have to provide a record of work even though all of the intended restricted building work has not been completed.
- [16] This is what has occurred in the present case. The Complainant says the building work was completed in September 2016. Following its completion a dispute arose including a dispute about payments. The disputed matters continue to be pursued by both the Complainant and the Respondent and it is not clear whether the contractual relationship between them has come to an end or not.
- [17] What is clear from reviewing the documentation before the Board, including the Residential Final Checklist dated 23 February 2017 which was completed in anticipation of an application for a Code Compliance Certificate, that not only was the restricted building work complete there was very little if any likelihood that the Respondent would be returning to carry out any further building work, restricted or otherwise. Given this the Respondent’s restricted building work had, in effect, been completed and a record of work was due.

- [18] A record of work has still not been provided. On this basis the disciplinary offence has been committed.
- [19] Section 317(1)(da)(ii) of the Act provides for a defence of the licenced building practitioner having a “good reason” for failing to provide a record of work. If they can, on the balance of probabilities, prove to the Board that one exists then it is open to the Board to find that a disciplinary offence has not been committed. Each case will be decided by the Board on its own merits but the threshold for a good reason is high.
- [20] The Respondent has raised non-payment of invoices and his following advice received as good reasons.
- [21] With regard to non-payment of invoices the Board has repeatedly stated that a record of work is a statutory requirement, not a negotiable term of a contract. The requirement for it is not affected by the terms of a contract, nor by contractual disputes. Licensed building practitioners should now be aware of their obligations to provide them and their provision should be a matter of routine.
- [22] The Respondent, however, has stated that he followed advice as regards non provision of documentation. Such advice, as it pertains to records of work, is erroneous. As noted above, unlike for example a producer statement, a record of work is a statutory document and cannot be withheld for commercial reasons.
- [23] The Board also cautions that care needs to be taken when seeking advice. In this instance, from reviewing the documentation received, it would seem a generic enquiry was sought and response given as regards contractual matters and not specifically about records of work.
- [24] Given the above no good reasons are found to have existed and as such the disciplinary offence has been committed. The Respondent’s reliance on incorrect advice will, however, be taken into consideration as a mitigating factor as regards the appropriate penalty.

Penalty, Costs and Publication

- [25] Having found that one or more of the grounds in section 317 applies the Board must, under section 318 of the Actⁱ, consider the appropriate disciplinary penalty, whether the Respondent should be ordered to pay any costs and whether the decision should be published.
- [26] The matter was dealt with on the papers. Included was information relevant to penalty, costs and publication as outlined above and the Board has decided to make indicative orders and give the Respondent an opportunity to provide further evidence or submissions relevant to the indicative orders.

Penalty

- [27] The purpose of professional discipline is to uphold the integrity of the profession; the focus is not punishment, but the enforcement of a high standard of propriety and professional conduct. The Board does note, however, that the High Court in *Patel v Complaints Assessment Committee*⁶ commented on the role of "punishment" in giving penalty orders stating that punitive orders are, at times, necessary to provide a deterrent and to uphold professional standards. The Court noted:

[28] I therefore propose to proceed on the basis that, although the protection of the public is a very important consideration, nevertheless the issues of punishment and deterrence must also be taken into account in selecting the appropriate penalty to be imposed.

- [28] The Board also notes that in *Lochhead v Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment*⁷ the court noted that whilst the statutory principles of sentencing set out in the Sentencing Act 2002 do not apply to the Building Act they have the advantage of simplicity and transparency. The court recommended adopting a starting point for penalty based on the seriousness of the disciplinary offending prior to considering any aggravating and/or mitigating factors.
- [29] Record of work matters are at the lower end of the disciplinary scale. Countering this is the Respondent's continued refusal to provide a record of work.
- [30] The Board's normal starting point for a failure to provide a record of work is a fine of \$1,500. There are mitigating circumstances including the commercial dispute and the erroneous advice relied on. The refusal to provide a record of work for commercial reasons is an aggravating factor. On the balance the Board does not consider a discount or reduction is warranted.

Costs

- [31] Under s 318(4) the Board may require the Respondent "to pay the costs and expenses of, and incidental to, the inquiry by the Board."
- [32] The Respondent should note that the High Court has held that 50% of total reasonable costs should be taken as a starting point in disciplinary proceedings and that the percentage can then be adjusted up or down having regard to the particular circumstances of each case⁸.
- [33] In *Collie v Nursing Council of New Zealand*⁹ where the order for costs in the tribunal was 50% of actual costs and expenses the High Court noted that:

⁶ HC Auckland CIV-2007-404-1818, 13 August 2007 at p 27

⁷ 3 November 2016, CIV-2016-070-000492, [2016] NZDC 21288

⁸ *Cooray v The Preliminary Proceedings Committee* HC, Wellington, AP23/94, 14 September 1995, *Macdonald v Professional Conduct Committee*, HC, Auckland, CIV 2009-404-1516, 10 July 2009, *Owen v Wynyard* HC, Auckland, CIV-2009-404-005245, 25 February 2010.

⁹ [2001] NZAR 74

But for an order for costs made against a practitioner, the profession is left to carry the financial burden of the disciplinary proceedings, and as a matter of policy that is not appropriate.

- [34] The Board notes the matter was dealt with on the papers. Ordinarily costs for a hearing would be in the order of \$1,000 but the Board has reduced this to \$500 being an amount the Board considers is reasonable for the Respondent to pay toward the costs and expenses of, and incidental to, the inquiry by the Board.

Publication

- [35] As a consequence of its decision the Respondent's name and the disciplinary outcomes will be recorded in the public register maintained as part of the Licensed Building Practitioners' scheme as is required by the Act¹⁰. The Board is also able, under s 318(5) of the Act, to order publication over and above the public register:

In addition to requiring the Registrar to notify in the register an action taken by the Board under this section, the Board may publicly notify the action in any other way it thinks fit.

- [36] As a general principle such further public notification may be required where the Board perceives a need for the public and/or the profession to know of the findings of a disciplinary hearing. This is in addition to the Respondent being named in this decision.
- [37] Within New Zealand there is a principle of open justice and open reporting which is enshrined in the Bill of Rights Act 1990¹¹. The Criminal Procedure Act 2011 sets out grounds for suppression within the criminal jurisdiction¹². Within the disciplinary hearing jurisdiction the courts have stated that the provisions in the Criminal Procedure Act do not apply but can be instructive¹³. The High Court provided guidance as to the types of factors to be taken into consideration in *N v Professional Conduct Committee of Medical Council*¹⁴.
- [38] The courts have also stated that an adverse finding in a disciplinary case usually requires that the name of the practitioner be published in the public interest¹⁵. It is, however, common practice in disciplinary proceedings to protect the names of other persons involved as naming them does not assist the public interest.
- [39] Based on the above the Board will not order further publication.

Section 318 Order

- [40] For the reasons set out above, the Board directs that:

¹⁰ Refer sections 298, 299 and 301 of the Act

¹¹ Section 14 of the Act

¹² Refer sections 200 and 202 of the Criminal Procedure Act

¹³ *N v Professional Conduct Committee of Medical Council* [2014] NZAR 350

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ *Kewene v Professional Conduct Committee of the Dental Council* [2013] NZAR 1055

Penalty: Pursuant to s 318(1)(f) of the Building Act 2004, the Respondent is ordered to pay a fine of \$1,500.

Costs: Pursuant to s 318(4) of the Act, the Respondent is ordered to pay costs of \$500 (GST included) towards the costs of, and incidental to, the inquiry of the Board.

Publication: The Registrar shall record the Board's action in the Register of Licensed Building Practitioners in accordance with s 301(1)(iii) of the Act.

In terms of section 318(5) of the Act, there will not be action taken to publicly notify the Board's action, except for the note in the Register and the Respondent being named in this decision.

- [41] The Respondent should note that the Board may, under section 319 of the Act, suspend or cancel a licensed building practitioner's licence if fines or costs imposed as a result of disciplinary action are not paid.

Submissions on Penalty, Costs and Publication

- [42] The Board invites the Respondent to make written submissions on the matters of disciplinary penalty, costs and publication up until close of business on **9 October 2017**. The submissions should focus on mitigating matters as they relate to the penalty, costs and publication orders. If no submissions are received then this decision will become final. If submissions are received then the Board will meet and consider those submissions prior to coming to a final decision on penalty, costs and publication.

Right of Appeal

- [43] The right to appeal Board decisions is provided for in s 330(2) of the Actⁱⁱ.

Signed and dated this 15th day of September 2017.



Chris Preston
Presiding Member

ⁱ **Section 318 of the Act**

(1) *In any case to which section 317 applies, the Board may*
 (a) *do both of the following things:*
 (i) *cancel the person's licensing, and direct the Registrar to remove the person's name from the register; and*

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- (ii) *order that the person may not apply to be relicensed before the expiry of a specified period:*
 - (b) *suspend the person's licensing for a period of no more than 12 months or until the person meets specified conditions relating to the licensing (but, in any case, not for a period of more than 12 months) and direct the Registrar to record the suspension in the register:*
 - (c) *restrict the type of building work or building inspection work that the person may carry out or supervise under the person's licensing class or classes and direct the Registrar to record the restriction in the register:*
 - (d) *order that the person be censured:*
 - (e) *order that the person undertake training specified in the order:*
 - (f) *order that the person pay a fine not exceeding \$10,000.*
 - (2) *The Board may take only one type of action in subsection 1(a) to (d) in relation to a case, except that it may impose a fine under subsection (1)(f) in addition to taking the action under subsection (1)(b) or (d).*
 - (3) *No fine may be imposed under subsection (1)(f) in relation to an act or omission that constitutes an offence for which the person has been convicted by a court.*
 - (4) *In any case to which section 317 applies, the Board may order that the person must pay the costs and expenses of, and incidental to, the inquiry by the Board.*
 - (5) *In addition to requiring the Registrar to notify in the register an action taken by the Board under this section, the Board may publicly notify the action in any other way it thinks fit."*

ii Section 330 Right of appeal

- (2) *A person may appeal to a District Court against any decision of the Board—*
 - (b) *to take any action referred to in section 318.*

Section 331 Time in which appeal must be brought

An appeal must be lodged—

- (a) *within 20 working days after notice of the decision or action is communicated to the appellant; or*
- (b) *within any further time that the appeal authority allows on application made before or after the period expires.*