

Before the Building Practitioners Board

	BPB Complaint No. CB25352
Licensed Building Practitioner:	Song Gao (the Respondent)
Licence Number:	BP 111042
Licence(s) Held:	Bricklaying and Blocklaying – AOP Veneer and Structural Masonry

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	Auckland
Hearing Type:	On the Papers
Hearing Date:	17 December 2019
Draft Decision Date:	11 February 2020
Final Decision Date:	4 March 2020

Board Members Present:

Chris Preston (Presiding)
Robin Dunlop, Retired Professional Engineer
Bob Monteith, LBP Carpentry and Site AOP 2
Rob Shao, LBP, Carpentry and Site AOP 1

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.

Contents

Introduction	2
Disciplinary Offences Under Consideration	3
Function of Disciplinary Action	3
Evidence	4
Draft Conclusion and Reasoning	4
Draft Decision on Penalty, Costs and Publication	6
Penalty	6
Costs.....	7
Publication	7
Draft Section 318 Order	8
Submissions on Draft Decision	8
Request for In-Person Hearing	9
Right of Appeal	9

Introduction

- [1] On 17 December 2019 the Board received a Registrar’s Report in respect of a complaint about the conduct of the Respondent.
- [2] Under regulation 10 of the Complaints Regulations the Board must, on receipt of the Registrar’s Report, decide whether to proceed no further with the complaint because regulation 9 of the Complaints Regulations applies.
- [3] Having received the report the Board decided that regulation 9 did not apply. Under regulation 10 the Board is required to hold a hearing.
- [4] The Board’s jurisdiction is that of an inquiry. Complaints are not prosecuted before the Board. Rather, it is for the Board to carry out any further investigation that it considers is necessary prior to it making a decision. In this respect the Act provides that the Board may regulate its own procedures¹. It has what is described as a summary jurisdiction in that the Board has a degree of flexibility in how it deals with matters; it retains an inherent jurisdiction beyond that set out in the enabling legislation². As such it may depart from its normal procedures if it considers doing so would achieve the purposes of the Act and it is not contrary to the interests of natural justice to do so.

¹ Clause 27 of Schedule 3

² *Castles v Standards Committee No.* [2013] NZHC 2289, *Orlov v National Standards Committee 1* [2013] NZHC 1955

- [5] In this instance the Board has decided that a formal hearing is not necessary. The Board considers that there is sufficient evidence before it to allow it to make a decision on the papers.
- [6] The Board does, however, note that there may be further evidence in the possession of persons involved in the matter or that the Board may not have interpreted the evidence correctly. To that end this decision is a draft Board decision. The Respondent will be provided with an opportunity to make comment on the Board's draft findings and to present further evidence prior to the Board making a final decision. If the Board directs or the Respondent requests an in-person hearing, then one will be scheduled.

Disciplinary Offences Under Consideration

- [7] On the basis of the Registrar's Report the Respondent's conduct that the Board resolved to investigate was that the Respondent had 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

- [8] 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*³ and in New Zealand in *Dentice v Valuers Registration Board*⁴.
- [9] 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*⁵ Collins J. noted that:
- "... the disciplinary process does not exist to appease those who are dissatisfied The disciplinary process ... exists to ensure professional standards are maintained in order to protect clients, the profession and the broader community."*
- [10] In a similar vein the Board's investigation and hearing process is not designed to address every issue that is raised in a complaint or by a complainant. The disciplinary scheme under the Act and Complaint's Regulations focuses on serious conduct that warrants investigation and, if upheld, disciplinary action. Focusing on serious

³ *R v Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales* [2011] UKSC 1, 19 January 2011.

⁴ [1992] 1 NZLR 720 at p 724

⁵ [2016] HZHC 2276 at para 164

conduct is consistent with decisions made in the New Zealand courts in relation to the conduct of licensed persons⁶:

... the statutory test is not met by mere professional incompetence or by deficiencies in the practice of the profession. Something more is required. It includes a deliberate departure from accepted standards or such serious negligence as, although not deliberate, to portray indifference and an abuse.

- [11] Finally, 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. Those grounds do not include contractual breaches other than when the conduct reaches the high threshold for consideration under section 317(1)(i) of the Act which deals with disrepute.

Evidence

- [12] The Board must be satisfied on the balance of probabilities that the disciplinary offences alleged have been committed⁷. 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.
- [13] The Respondent was engaged to carry out a building work on a new residential build under a building consent. The Respondents building work, which started on or about 17 July 2019 and was completed on or about 20 August 2019, involved bricklaying which is restricted building work.
- [14] Following completion of the Respondent’s work, the Complainant alleged the Respondent failed to provide a record of work for his restricted building work. A complaint was made. The Complainant noted that there was a commercial dispute.
- [15] On 17 October 2019 the Complainant advised that, following the complaint having been made, a record of work dated 12 October 2019 had been provided by the Respondent.
- [16] The Respondent provided a response to the complaint. In it he noted the commercial dispute. He stated that he had cut his losses and forewent an invoice of \$350 for an acid wash and that the record of work had now been provided.
- [17] The Auckland Council advised that as of 16 December 2019 a record of work had not been received from the Respondent.

Draft Conclusion and Reasoning

- [18] 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

⁶ *Pillai v Messiter (No 2)* (1989) 16 NSWLR 197 (A) at 200

⁷ *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.

- [19] 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 work⁸.
- [20] 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.
- [21] The Board discussed issues with regard to records of work in its decision C2-01170⁹ 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.
- [22] 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.
- [23] 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 ...”.
- [24] 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.
- [25] Completion in this instance occurred on or about 20 August 2019. A record of work was not provided until 12 October 2019 and only after a complaint had been made to the Board. On this basis the Board finds that there was an unreasonable delay and as such that the record of work was not provided on completion as required and the disciplinary offence has been committed.
- [26] 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.

⁸ Restricted Building Work is defined by the Building (Definition of Restricted Building Work) Order 2011

⁹ *Licensed Building Practitioners Board Case Decision C2-01170* 15 December 2015

[27] In this instance there was an ongoing commercial and payment dispute. 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.

Draft Decision on Penalty, Costs and Publication

[28] 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.

[29] The matter was dealt with on the papers. Included was information relevant to penalty, costs and publication 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

[30] 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*¹⁰ 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.

[31] The Board also notes that in *Lochhead v Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment*¹¹ 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.

[32] Record of work matters are at the lower end of the disciplinary scale. The Board's normal starting point for a failure to provide a record of work is a fine of \$1,500. There are no aggravating nor mitigating factors present. As such the Board sees no reason to depart from the starting point. The fine is set at \$1,500.

¹⁰ HC Auckland CIV-2007-404-1818, 13 August 2007 at p 27

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

Costs

- [33] Under section 318(4) the Board may require the Respondent “to pay the costs and expenses of, and incidental to, the inquiry by the Board.”
- [34] 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 case¹².
- [35] In *Collie v Nursing Council of New Zealand*¹³ where the order for costs in the tribunal was 50% of actual costs and expenses the High Court noted that:
- 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.*
- [36] The Board notes the matter was dealt with on the papers. There has, however, been costs incurred investigating the matter, producing the Registrar’s Report and in the Board making its decision. The costs have been less than those that would have been incurred had a full hearing been held. As such the Board will order that costs of \$500 be paid by the Respondent. The Board considers that this is a reasonable sum for the Respondent to pay toward the costs and expenses of, and incidental to, the inquiry by the Board.

Publication

- [37] 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 Act¹⁴. The Board is also able, under section 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.*
- [38] 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.
- [39] Within New Zealand there is a principle of open justice and open reporting which is enshrined in the Bill of Rights Act 1990¹⁵. The Criminal Procedure Act 2011 sets out

¹² *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.

¹³ [2001] NZAR 74

¹⁴ Refer sections 298, 299 and 301 of the Act

¹⁵ Section 14 of the Act

grounds for suppression within the criminal jurisdiction¹⁶. Within the disciplinary hearing jurisdiction, the courts have stated that the provisions in the Criminal Procedure Act do not apply but can be instructive¹⁷. 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*¹⁸.

[40] 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 interest¹⁹. 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.

[41] Based on the above the Board will not order further publication.

Draft Section 318 Order

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

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

Costs: Pursuant to section 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 section 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.

[43] 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 Draft Decision

[44] The Board invites the Respondent to:

- (a) provide further evidence for the Board to consider; and/or
- (b) make written submissions on the Board's findings. Submissions may be on the substantive findings and/or on the findings on penalty, costs and publication.

[45] Submissions and/or further evidence must be filed with the Board by no later than the close of business on **3 March 2020**.

¹⁶ Refer sections 200 and 202 of the Criminal Procedure Act

¹⁷ *N v Professional Conduct Committee of Medical Council* [2014] NZAR 350

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ *Kewene v Professional Conduct Committee of the Dental Council* [2013] NZAR 1055

- [46] If submissions are received, then the Board will meet and consider those submissions.
- [47] The Board may, on receipt of any of the material received, give notice that an in-person hearing is required prior to it making a final decision. Alternatively, the Board may proceed to make a final decision which will be issued in writing.
- [48] If no submissions or further evidence is received within the time frame specified, then this decision will become final.

Request for In-Person Hearing

- [49] If the Respondent, having received and considered the Board's Draft Decision, considers that an in-person hearing is required then one will be scheduled, and a notice of hearing will be issued.
- [50] A request for an in-person hearing must be made in writing to the Board Officer no later than the close of business on **3 March 2020**.

Right of Appeal

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

Signed and dated this 11th day of February 2020



Chris Preston
Presiding Member

This decision and the order herein were made final on 4 March 2020 on the basis that no further submissions were received.

Signed and dated this 4th day of March 2020



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*
- (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.*