

NOTICE OF DETERMINATION

A notice made under s318 of the *Legal Profession Uniform Law (Victoria)*.

Complainant: Victorian Legal Services Commissioner
Respondent Lawyer/Law Practice: [REDACTED]
Ref: [REDACTED]

ORDERS

Pursuant to s299 (2) of the *Legal Profession Uniform Law (Victoria)* ("the Uniform Law"), I have decided that [REDACTED] has engaged in unsatisfactory professional conduct and I make the following orders –

- (a) The Respondent Lawyer is cautioned pursuant to s 299(1) (a) of the Uniform Law.

STATEMENT OF REASONS

BACKGROUND

1. The Respondent Lawyer was admitted to practice in Victoria on 11 August 2009.
2. The Respondent Lawyer applied for her first practising certificate on 9 February 2010.
3. On 20 December 2016, the Legal Services Board (the Board) became aware that the Respondent Lawyer was engaging in legal practice in this jurisdiction without a valid practising certificate.
4. The Respondent Lawyer applied for a grant of a practising certificate immediately via LSB Online and as part of that application disclosed her failure to lodge a renewal application.
5. After reviewing the Respondent Lawyer's written statement, it was considered that the respondent lawyer had engaged in unqualified legal practice from 1 July 2016 until 20 December 2016.
6. On 16 January 2017, the Legal Services Commissioner notified the Respondent Lawyer that her conduct appeared to amount to unsatisfactory professional conduct and proposed a caution as an appropriate determination.
7. On 8 February 2017, the Respondent Lawyer consented in writing to the proposal to determine her conduct as unsatisfactory professional conduct and order a caution.

ISSUES UNDER INVESTIGATION

The issue/s that have been investigated are as follows:

8. A suitability matter file ([REDACTED]) was opened on 20 December 2016 to establish if the Respondent Lawyer had engaged in unqualified legal practice.

9. The issue under investigation here is whether the conduct amounts to unsatisfactory professional conduct.

RELEVANT LAW

10. Section 45(2) of the Uniform Law provides that the Board must not grant a practising certificate if it considers that the applicant is not a fit and proper person to hold the certificate. In considering whether a person is fit and proper, the Board may have regard to the matters set out in the *Legal Profession Uniform General Rules 2014* (the Uniform Rules), see s 45(3) of the Uniform Law.
11. Most relevant for the purpose of considering the Respondent Lawyer's suitability is rule 3(d)(i) of the Uniform Rules which states that the Board may have regard to "...whether the applicant has engaged in legal practice in Australia when not permitted to do so under a law ... of a State or Territory".
12. Section 10(1) of the Uniform Law states that an entity must not engage in legal practice unless it is a qualified entity. A qualified entity is defined in s 6 of the Uniform Law as an Australian legal practitioner, and an Australian legal practitioner is defined, in turn, as someone who holds a current practising certificate.
13. The penalty for breach of this provision is 250 penalty units or imprisonment for two years, or both. The objectives of the unqualified legal practice provisions is to ensure that legal work is carried out only by those who are properly qualified and entitled to do so and to protect clients of law practices (s 9 of the Uniform Law).
14. Section 296 of the Uniform Law states that unsatisfactory professional conduct includes conduct of a lawyer occurring in connection with the practice of law that falls short of the standard of competence and diligence that a member of the public is entitled to expect of a reasonably competent lawyer.
15. Section 298(a) of the Uniform Law provides that conduct consisting of a contravention of the Uniform Law is capable of constituting unsatisfactory professional conduct.

FINDINGS OF FACT ON ISSUES UNDER INVESTIGATION

16. The key issues under determination are whether the Respondent Lawyer engaged in unqualified legal practice.
17. The Respondent Lawyer mistakenly believed her practising certificate was renewed.
18. It is clear that the Respondent Lawyer has breached section 10(1) of the Uniform Law by engaging in legal practice from 1 July 2016 until 20 December 2016 without a valid practising certificate.

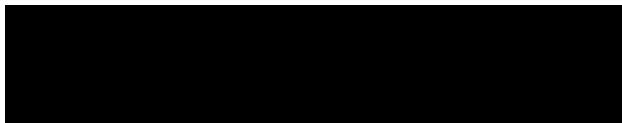
DETERMINATION & REASONS

19. Having considered all of the evidence and relevant law, and having found that the Respondent Lawyer engaged in unqualified legal practice as to amounting to unsatisfactory professional conduct, I determine that it is fair and reasonable in all the circumstances to make the orders detailed above.

20. The Respondent Lawyer's consent to this course of action and orders was also a reason for this determination.

APPEAL

21. Pursuant to s 314 of the Uniform Law, a respondent lawyer or a legal practitioner associate of a respondent law practice may, in accordance with the applicable legislation appeal to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, or seek a review by the VCAT, of this determination made under s 299 of the Uniform Law.



Michael McGarvie
Legal Services Commissioner
Date: 13 February 2017