Think Ahead ACCA

HEARING

DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CHARTERED CERTIFIED ACCOUNTANTS

REASONS FOR DECISION

In the matter of:	**Mr Mark Gregory Parsons**
Heard on:	**7 August 2025**
Location:	**Virtual hearing via Microsoft Teams**
Committee:	**HH Suzan Matthews KC (Chair)** **Mr Abdul Samad (Accountant)** **Mr Geoff Baines (Lay)**
Legal Adviser:	**Ms Jane Kilgannon**
Persons present and capacity:	**Mr James Halliday (Case Presenter on behalf of ACCA)** **Mr Mark Gregory Parsons (ACCA Member)** **Miss Nicole Boateng (Hearings Officer)**
Observer:	**Ms Bev Hill**
Summary:	**Reprimand**
Costs:	**Mr Parsons to pay £5,000.00 towards ACCA's costs**

1. The Disciplinary Committee (the Committee) convened to consider the case of Mr Mark Gregory Parsons (Mr Parsons).

2. The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) was represented by Mr James Halliday (Mr Halliday). Mr Parsons was present and was not represented.

3. The Committee had confirmed that it was not aware of any conflicts of interest in relation to the case.

4. In accordance with Regulation 11(1)(a) of the Chartered Certified Accountants' Complaints and Disciplinary Regulations 2014 (the Regulations), the hearing was conducted in public.

5. The hearing was conducted remotely through Microsoft Teams.

6. The Committee had considered the following documents in advance:

   a. a Hearing Bundle (pages 1 to 283);
   b. a Service Bundle (pages 1 to 20); and
   c. a completed Statement of Financial Position (pages 1 to 2).

PRELIMINARY MATTERS

7. Mr Parsons made an application that parts of the hearing be held in private, namely those parts of the hearing relating to [PRIVATE]. Mr Halliday did not oppose the application. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser that it had a discretion to hear part or all of the hearing in private where it found that there were exceptional circumstances in favour of doing so. The Committee had regard to the relevant guidance in ACCA's guidance documents 'Guidance for Disciplinary Committee hearings' (January 2021) and 'Guidance on publicity' (August 2023). The Committee decided that it would be appropriate to hold parts of the hearing in private, namely those parts of the hearing that related to [PRIVATE].

8. The Committee was informed that a member of staff from the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England & Wales (ICAEW) was attending the hearing as an observer. Mr Parsons informed the Committee that he was a member of ICAEW and had no objection to the observer's presence at the hearing. ACCA likewise raised no objection. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser that the hearing is a public hearing and so any member of the public may attend unless the Committee, pursuant to Regulation 11(2) of the Regulations, considered it appropriate to exclude them on the basis that they were likely to disrupt the orderly conduct of the proceedings. The Committee decided that it was appropriate to allow the observer to attend the hearing, noting that the observer would be excluded for any parts of the hearing held in private.

9. Mr Baines, one of the Lay Members of the Committee, disclosed that he also sits as a Lay Member for ICAEW, but that he has no involvement with ICAEW beyond that and has no recollection of any link to Mr Parsons via his role with ICAEW. The Committee invited representations from the parties on whether this could amount to a conflict of interest for Mr Baines sitting on the Committee in this case. Neither Mr Halliday nor Mr Parsons raised any concerns. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser, referring to the relevant test set out in the case of *Porter v Magill* [2001] UKHL 67. The Committee was satisfied that, given that there was no link or connection between Mr Baines and ICAEW other than in his professional role as a Lay Member, and that he had no knowledge of any link in that context to Mr Parsons, a fair-minded observer in possession of all of the relevant facts would not consider there to be a real possibility of bias (whether actual or perceived). The Committee therefore decided that it was appropriate to continue with the hearing with its current membership unchanged.

BACKGROUND

10. Mr Parsons became a Member of ACCA on 15 April 1998 and a Fellow on 15 April 2003. He held a practising certificate with audit qualification from 1 January 2003 to 31 December 2019.

11. Company B was incorporated on 21 May 2013. Mr Parsons has been the sole Director and sole Shareholder since incorporation. Mr Parsons remains recorded as Director of Company B at Companies House.

12. On 25 June 2019 ACCA received a complaint from HMRC regarding Mr Parsons. HMRC alleged that:

    a. Company B had submitted accounts to Companies House which were inconsistent with those submitted to HMRC;

    b. Company B had submitted VAT Returns reflecting turnover that was inconsistent with corresponding accounts and Corporation Tax Returns; and

    c. Company B had under-reported turnover in the Corporation Tax Returns as compared to that reported in the VAT Returns.

SCHEDULE OF ALLEGATIONS

Mr Mark Gregory Parsons (Mr Parsons) an ACCA Member:

1. On or around 31 August 2014 being the sole director of Company B Ltd submitted or caused to be submitted inconsistent accounts to HMRC and Companies House, as well as submitting VAT Returns reflecting turnover that was inconsistent with the corresponding accounts and Corporation Tax Returns.

2. On or around 31 August 2017 being the sole director of Company B submitted or caused to be submitted inconsistent accounts to HMRC and Companies House, as well as submitting VAT Returns reflecting turnover that was inconsistent with the corresponding accounts and Corporation Tax Returns.

3. By reason of the above Mr Parsons failed to comply with ACCA's Code of Ethics – Professional Competence and Due Care then in force.

4. Accordingly Mr Parsons is:-

   a. Guilty of misconduct pursuant to Bye-law 8(a)(i); or in the alternative

   b. Liable to disciplinary action pursuant to Bye-law 8(a)(iii).

DECISION ON ALLEGATIONS AND REASONS

Admissions

13. At the beginning of the hearing, Mr Parsons admitted the following allegations: Allegations 1, 2 and 3. The Committee was satisfied that Mr Parsons had made clear, unequivocal and unqualified admissions to Allegations 1, 2 and 3 and the Chair therefore announced, in accordance with Regulation 12(3)(c) of the Regulations, that Allegations 1, 2 and 3 were found proved.

14. Allegation 4 included an allegation of misconduct, which is a matter for the judgment of the Committee. The Committee therefore invited the parties to present evidence and submissions relevant to the Committee's consideration of Allegation 4.

Evidence and Submissions of ACCA

15. Mr Halliday outlined the ACCA case against Mr Parsons by reference to the documentary evidence contained within the papers before the Committee.

16. Mr Halliday submitted that Mr Parsons' conduct, in relation to the matters set out at Allegations 1, 2 and 3, had brought discredit to himself, ACCA and the accountancy profession as a whole because Mr Parsons was under a personal professional obligation to ensure that he acted competently and with due care but he had failed to do so.

17. Mr Halliday asserted that the discrepancies between the figures included in the accounts submitted to HMRC and Companies House, and in the Corporation Tax and VAT returns, were significant and that they related to two separate, non-consecutive accounting submissions.

18. Mr Halliday drew the Committee's attention to Section F of the ACCA Guidance for Disciplinary Sanctions document, which provides guidance for the assessment of seriousness in different case types.

19. Mr Halliday submitted that the conduct was so serious that it amounted to misconduct. In the alternative, Mr Halliday submitted that the conduct, in breaching an ACCA Rule, rendered Mr Parsons liable to disciplinary action.

Evidence and Submissions of Mr Parsons

20. Mr Parsons had provided detailed written responses to the ACCA allegations. Mr Parsons also gave oral evidence to the Committee.

21. Mr Parsons submitted that he accepted that he had fallen short of what was expected of a professional Accountant. He stressed that he did not submit the documents in question personally, but he accepted that he was responsible for ensuring their accuracy via effective supervision and control, which he had failed to do.

22. Mr Parsons asserted that the discrepancies identified by HMRC were rectified promptly and to the satisfaction of HMRC. Mr Parsons submitted that his failure was administrative in nature, and that there was no evidence of malice, dishonesty or loss having been caused to any party. Given this context, Mr Parsons submitted that his conduct had been at the lower end of the spectrum in terms of seriousness.

Decisions and Reasons

23. The Committee considered with care all of the evidence presented, and submissions made by Mr Halliday and Mr Parsons.

24. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser, who referred it to the relevant parts of the Regulations, the Bye-laws, the ACCA Code of Ethics and Conduct, guidance from relevant case law and the ACCA document 'Guidance for Disciplinary Committee Hearings' (1 January 2021).

25. The Committee noted that there was no burden and standard of proof applicable to its substantive consideration of misconduct. Rather, that was a matter for the judgment of the Committee.

Allegation 4(a) – proved

26. The Committee considered that Mr Parsons' admitted failure to meet the level of competence expected of professional accountants was serious enough to amount to misconduct. The Committee had particular regard to the following matters:

    a. The discrepancies in the relevant documents were significant and, if not corrected, could have led to Company B being undercharged for tax; and

    b. The discrepancies occurred across more than one accounting period.

27. The Committee noted that there was no allegation of dishonesty, lack of integrity or recklessness. It accepted that what had happened was that Mr Parsons had failed to exercise the expected level of supervision and control over his staff who had submitted on his behalf the documentation that contained significant discrepancies. The Committee noted that the errors were acknowledged by Mr Parsons when HMRC raised concerns, and that the discrepancies were promptly corrected.

28. Taking all of these matters into account, the Committee considered that Mr Parsons' conduct was not at the most serious end of the spectrum, but that he had certainly fallen short of the standards expected of professional accountants in a fundamental part of his core duties.

29. The Committee considered that such a lack of professionalism on the part of Mr Parsons had the potential to undermine the public's confidence in ACCA and the accountancy profession. It clearly brought discredit to Mr Parsons, ACCA and the accountancy profession.

30. For those reasons, the Committee concluded that the matters found proved at Allegations 1, 2 and 3, amounted to misconduct. Accordingly, the Committee found Allegation 4(a) proved in relation to Allegations 1, 2 and 3.

31. Given its finding in relation to Allegation 4(a), it was not necessary for the Committee to consider the alternative matter set out at Allegation 4(b).

DECISION ON SANCTION AND REASONS

32. Mr Halliday invited the Committee to consider the ACCA Guidance on Disciplinary Sanctions. He invited the Committee to consider Section F of the Guidance on Disciplinary Sanctions in terms of assessing seriousness. In terms of possible mitigating features in this case, he mentioned: no previous regulatory findings; cooperation and engagement with ACCA; early admissions; remorse; insight; corrective steps; no loss or adverse outcomes for others; no evidence of an attempt to conceal.

33. Mr Parsons provided detailed information about [PRIVATE].

34. [PRIVATE].

35. Mr Parsons accepted that his [PRIVATE] were not an excuse for his conduct, but provided an important piece of contextual information for the Committee.

36. Mr Parsons submitted that, with reference to the Guidance on Disciplinary Sanctions, an admonishment would be the most appropriate action for the Committee to take in this case. He submitted that this was because almost every factor listed at Section C2.1 of the guidance document was engaged in this case. He submitted that his conduct should be marked with some action

being taken, but as it was at the lower end of the spectrum, admonishment would be sufficient and proportionate.

37. In reaching its decision on sanction, the Committee took into account the evidence that it had already heard, and the submissions made by Mr Halliday and Mr Parsons. The Committee also referred to the ACCA document 'Guidance for Disciplinary Sanctions' (14 February 2024).

38. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser including the following principles:

    a. The purpose of a sanction is not to punish, but to protect the public, maintain public confidence in the profession and to maintain proper standards of conduct;

    b. Any sanction must be proportionate, so the Committee must balance the interests of the member with the interests of wider ACCA membership and the public; and

    c. The Committee must consider the sanctions in order of severity, starting with the least severe first.

39. When deciding on the appropriate sanction, the Committee carefully considered whether there were any aggravating and mitigating features in this case.

40. The Committee did not identify any aggravating features.

41. The Committee identified the following mitigating features:

    a. No previous regulatory findings;
    b. Full cooperation and engagement with ACCA;
    c. Early admissions;
    d. No mal-intent (in that no allegation of dishonesty, lack of integrity or recklessness);

e. Demonstration of genuine remorse;
f. Demonstration of significant insight;
g. Corrective steps taken to rectify the discrepancies in the documents submitted in relation to Company B;
h. No evidence of any loss to clients or the public purse;
i. [PRIVATE];
j. [PRIVATE];
k. Not strictly an 'isolated incident', but conduct appears to have persisted over a discrete period of time and is not continuing; and
l. Significant lapse of time since the occurrence of the matters in question (11 years and 8 years respectively).

42. Given that there had been early admissions, and a demonstration of remorse, insight and corrective steps, the Committee was satisfied that there was no more than a very low risk of repetition. The Committee therefore concluded that there was no ongoing risk to the public.

43. The Committee noted Section F of the guidance document, which indicated that a failure to exercise adequate control and supervision over a practice, would usually be categorised as 'Serious'. Taking that, together with the significant mitigation in this case, the Committee decided that the misconduct was properly to be assessed as being at the lower end of the spectrum of seriousness.

44. The Committee considered the available sanctions in increasing order of severity.

45. The Committee considered taking no action against Mr Parsons. However, given the nature of the admitted misconduct, the Committee considered that it would be inappropriate and disproportionately lenient to take no action.

46. The Committee considered imposing an admonishment on Mr Parsons. The Committee noted that the guidance indicated that an admonishment would be appropriate in cases where most of the following are present:

a. Evidence of no loss or adverse effect on client / members of the public;
b. Early admission of the facts alleged;
c. Insight into failings;
d. Isolated incident;
e. Not deliberate;
f. Genuine expression of remorse/apology;
g. Corrective steps have been taken promptly;
h. Subsequent work satisfactory; and
i. Relevant and appropriate testimonials and references.

47. The Committee considered that this was not a case where an admonishment would be appropriate. Most of the factors listed were present in this case. However, the Committee considered that this sanction would not adequately address the public interest in upholding standards of conduct and performance and in maintaining public confidence in the profession and in ACCA.

48. The Committee next considered imposing a reprimand. The Committee noted that the guidance indicated that a reprimand would be appropriate in cases where:

a. The misconduct is of a minor nature;

b. There appears to be no continuing risk to the public; and

c. There has been sufficient evidence of an individual's understanding, together with genuine insight into the conduct found proved.

49. The Committee was satisfied that this case fell within that set of circumstances. Given the significant mitigation, the seriousness of the misconduct fell at the lower end of the spectrum and, given Mr Parsons' demonstration of significant insight and corrective steps, there was no continuing risk to the public. For those reasons, the Committee considered that a reprimand would be the appropriate and proportionate sanction to impose in this case.

50. To check its reasoning, the Committee next considered whether it should instead impose a severe reprimand. The Committee noted that the guidance indicated that a severe reprimand would be appropriate in cases where the conduct is of a serious nature but where the circumstances of the case or mitigation advanced satisfies the Committee that there is no continuing risk to the public. The Committee's view was that the significant mitigation in this case lessened the seriousness of the misconduct, such that a severe reprimand would be a disproportionate response. The Committee considered that a severe reprimand was not necessary in order to protect the public, or to uphold standards of conduct and performance, or to maintain public confidence in the profession and ACCA.

51. The Committee considered whether to also impose a fine on Mr Parsons. However, referring to the Guidance on fines and the factors listed at paragraph C6.3 of the Guidance for Disciplinary Sanctions, the Committee considered that this was not a case which required a fine in order to adequately address the public interest. There had been no actual personal or financial benefit to Mr Parsons.

52. The Committee therefore concluded that the appropriate and proportionate sanction to impose in this case was a reprimand.

DECISION ON COSTS AND REASONS

53. Mr Halliday, on behalf of ACCA, applied for Mr Parsons to make a contribution to the costs of ACCA in bringing this case. Mr Halliday applied for costs in the sum of £10,037.00. The application was supported by two schedules breaking down the costs incurred by ACCA in connection with the hearing.

54. Mr Halliday acknowledged that there had been significant delays in ACCA bringing this case to a hearing, predominantly caused by staff turnover in the investigation team at ACCA and because of delays in liaising with the complainant in this case, HMRC. Mr Halliday confirmed that none of the delays were the responsibility of Mr Parsons.

55. Mr Halliday also drew the Committee's attention to items in the costs schedule that related to estimates for the time that he and the Hearings Officer would spend in attendance at the hearing today.

56. Mr Parsons had provided the Committee with a completed Statement of Financial Position. Mr Parsons stated that [PRIVATE].

57. Mr Parsons submitted that he should not be required to pay for the full costs presented in the ACCA costs schedule because:

    a. Not all of the complaints brought to ACCA by HMRC have resulted in allegations before this Committee today;

    b. There must have been unnecessary repetition of work given the high turnover of staff in the relevant investigation team at ACCA;

    c. The delays in the progress of the ACCA investigation in this case were not down to him – he made early admissions.

58. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser who referred the Committee to Regulation 15(1) of the Regulations and the ACCA document 'Guidance for Costs Orders' (September 2023).

59. The Committee was satisfied that ACCA was entitled to costs in principle and had been justified in investigating these matters. Therefore, some of the costs claimed were clearly reasonable and proportionate.

60. The Committee considered that there had been a very significant delay in bringing this case to the Committee. The complaint had been received by ACCA in 2019, and so it had taken six years for the case to be concluded. The Committee also noted that there had been an acceptance by ACCA of a significant staff turnover in the investigation team during that period and so there must have been some repetition of work. In acknowledgement of these matters, the Committee considered that it would be appropriate to make a reduction in the amount of costs awarded.

61. On the basis of the information provided by Mr Parsons as to his financial circumstances, the Committee found no basis for reducing the costs payable [PRIVATE].

62. Taking all of these circumstances into account, the Committee decided that Mr Parsons should be ordered to make a contribution to the costs of ACCA in the sum of £5,000.00.

ORDER

63. The Committee made the following order:

    a. Mr Parsons shall be reprimanded; and

    b. Mr Parsons shall make a contribution to ACCA's costs in the sum of £5,000.00.

EFFECTIVE DATE OF ORDER

64. In accordance with Regulation 20(1)(a) of the Regulations, the order relating to reprimand shall take effect at the expiry of the appeal period.

65. In accordance with Regulation 20(2) of the Regulations, the order relating to costs shall take effect immediately.

HH Suzan Matthews KC
Chair
7 August 2025