

DECLARATION OF OFFENCES BY POTENTIAL CANDIDATES FOR INITIATION

1. The Candidate's Situation

Unless an offence is 'spent' under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, candidates for Freemasonry must declare all and every court conviction; findings against them of dishonest or disgraceful behaviour; discipline imposed by a professional, trade or other tribunal, and/or whether they are awaiting or anticipating any such proceedings. To omit to do so would have severe consequences for the candidate should any of the above be discovered once he had become a Mason.

Such a declaration must be included in the Registration Form 'P' of the candidate, and unless the offence is so slight that it falls within the discretion of the Provincial Grand Master, the Province must submit the Form to the Grand Secretary in order to seek his permission for the candidate to proceed.

Proposers and Seconders therefore have a serious and substantial responsibility to make this clear to any candidate known to be so placed. He could feel himself under some personal scrutiny and statements may be required from Proposers, Seconders and the Lodge Interviewing Committee explaining why they consider such a candidate to be suitable to be a Mason.

Masonic Law on these matters is extremely demanding and unyielding and Lodges should think very carefully whether, in some circumstances, a candidate in this position should proceed further.

This should not, however, discourage the application of a man whose, perhaps youthful, indiscretions are well behind him and whose supporters believe him to be free of the possibility of conduct '*likely to bring Freemasonry into disrepute*', which is the key phrase to be borne in mind in this connection.

2. What the Secretary/Scribe E must do

A recent sequence of embarrassing situations for lodges (and their Secretaries) leads us to offer clear advice on what to do when a candidate for initiation declares (as he must) convictions in a court of law.

ANY FORM CONTAINING ANY DECLARATION WHATSOEVER MUST BE SUBMITTED TO THE PROVINCE BEFORE THE CANDIDATE IS PROPOSED.

The Province has recently received completed Forms P containing such declarations **AFTER THE CANDIDATE HAS BEEN INITIATED**, which are not acceptable retrospectively by Grand Lodge, who can declare the candidate not to be a Mason, *despite his initiation having misguidedly gone ahead*.

*There follows a **check-list** of what the Secretary must do to avoid this calamitous embarrassment for himself, his lodge and, above all, the candidate.*

1. The Secretary, Proposer and Secunder must show the candidate page 2 of Form P and invite him to read it carefully himself. *If they believe declaration of an offence is likely to be necessary, they should make clear to him his situation as in section 1 above.*

2. They ask him to declare whether or not he has been 'convicted by a Court' of any offence.

Note (a) *The key phrase is 'convicted by a Court'. One-off speeding fines which had no further implications (such as a driving ban) can usually be excluded from consideration. If so, they should **not be mentioned on the form at all.***

Note (b) *In the case of any conviction which the candidate knows for certain is 'spent' by the passage of time under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, he need not mention it. If he chooses to do so, he still need not declare it on the Form. A person in that situation should be expected to know when or whether his conviction is 'spent'. (As examples for information, Fines and Community Service Orders are spent after 5 years; imprisonment up to 6 months is spent after 7 years; imprisonment between 6 and 30 months after 10 years, and imprisonment more than 30 months is NEVER spent.)* **Any candidate who makes an untrue assertion at this point risks serious Masonic discipline, which could include expulsion from the Craft, if it later comes to light.**

3. If he needs to make a declaration, he must cross out clause 5(a) on the form and explain separately in writing the nature of the offence(s) with details. *He is at liberty to offer mitigation, and his Proposer and Secunder would also be expected to do so. Even if he simply has it in mind to say 'speeding offences' on the form or 'excluding driving offences', that is not adequate and he must make a full explanation at this point.*

4. Every Form P which contains a declaration must then be signed by The Master at the foot of page three, AND BEFORE THE CANDIDATE IS PROPOSED, it must be sent to The Province, who will put it before The Provincial Grand Master. *If he considers the matter disclosed to be sufficiently minor as to be within his discretion (which excludes any conviction for which imprisonment could have been at all possible), he will sign the Certificate of The Grand Secretary on page 4. Otherwise he will send it to the Grand Secretary with a recommendation based upon the information offered to him by the candidate, his sponsors and the lodge.*

5. ONLY WHEN THAT FORM COMES BACK TO THE SECRETARY SIGNED BY THE GRAND SECRETARY OR THE PROVINCIAL GRAND MASTER *can the candidate be proposed in open lodge. Immediately after the initiation, the Form is returned to the Province in the usual way.*