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| New Zealand Post reconsiders redirection policy for student hostel residents |
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| Legislation Ombudsmen Act 1975  Agency New Zealand Post  Ombudsman Sir Brian Elwood  Case number(s) W37133  Date 1997 |

*Misleading advertising re mail redirection service—not available to students in halls of residence—review of policy in specific case, not of general application*

A student living in a university hall of residence complained that an advertisement for New Zealand Post’s mail redirection service was misleading because it gave the impression that the service was available to anyone moving house whereas it was not available to him or to other students living in halls of residence. In response to his complaint to the Company, it had said the service was not available to students living in this type of accommodation because of the itinerant nature of students and the consequential likelihood of confusion between students with the same name living in the same hall of residence. The Company offered the student its free change of address cards, but this did not satisfy the complainant.

In its report on this complaint, New Zealand Post referred to its policy as set out in the Postal Users’ Guide in relation to its mail redirection service. It also noted that the complainant had previously referred his complaint to the Advertising Standards Complaints Board which had not upheld the complaint. In essence, the service is provided to ‘householders’, but it is not offered for letters addressed to people moving from clubs, hotels, boarding houses or hospitals. In respect of students living in halls of residence, New Zealand Post argued that there could well be more than one student with the same surname and initial living in a hall of residence and at the end of the year they would move to different addresses. In such circumstances, it would not be able to ensure that mail was redirected to the right person.

The arguments advanced by New Zealand Post appeared, on their face, to be reasonable. However, the complainant pointed out that his particular hall of residence was, in fact, comparable to a block of flats with individual post boxes for each flat. He therefore maintained that New Zealand Post’s refusal to provide the redirection service was discriminatory compared with residents of flats.

In response, New Zealand Post explained that the two situations were not entirely comparable. Whereas correspondence to people living in flats is addressed to a specific flat, thus enabling mail to be distinguished for redirection purposes, that was not the case with the hall of residence. There the mail was delivered in one bag and sorted by hall staff. Accordingly, to offer a redirection service would require the contents of the bag of mail for the hall to be resorted each day to identify mail to be redirected. However, New Zealand Post agreed to review its mail delivery arrangements to the particular hall of residence and consider whether it could provide the mail redirection service for residents there.

It was concluded that New Zealand Post’s mail redirection policy was not unreasonable and that its undertaking to review the complainant’s specific circumstances represented a satisfactory outcome to the complaint.

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