



National College for
Teaching & Leadership

Ms Helen Louise Wood Professional conduct panel outcome

**Panel decision and reasons on behalf of the
Secretary of State for Education**

May 2015

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Professional conduct panel decision and recommendations, and decision on behalf of the Secretary of State

Teacher:	Ms Helen Louise Wood
Teacher ref no:	9737539
Teacher date of birth:	6 March 1968
NCTL case ref no:	12012
Date of determination:	15 May 2015
Former employer:	Haydock High School

A. Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the National College for Teaching and Leadership (“the National College”) convened on 14 and 15 May 2015 at 53-55 Butts Road, Earlsdon Park, Coventry CV1 3BH to consider the case of Ms Helen Louise Wood.

The panel members were Mr Tony Heath (lay panellist in the chair), Ms Kathy Thomson (teacher panellist) and Professor Ian Hughes (lay panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Mr Robin Havard of Blake Morgan LLP solicitors.

The presenting officer for the National College was Ms Michelle Lau.

Ms Wood was present and was represented by Ms Sarah Gill.

Other than where stipulated, the meeting took place in public and was recorded.

B. Allegations

It was alleged Ms Wood was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute in that whilst employed at Haydock Sports College, St Helens during March 2014 she failed to apply the statutory controlled assessment conditions during a Modern World Controlled Assessment in that:

1. She provided students with an answer sheet and directed students to include in their response to the Controlled Assessment the terms in bold in the answer sheet;
2. She supported a student, Pupil A, in his response to the assessment by providing him with written documentation;
3. In so doing 1 and 2 above she acted dishonestly.

Ms Wood provided an equivocal admission to allegation 1 and therefore the panel approached the proceedings on the basis that the allegation was denied.

Ms Wood denied allegation 2.

As a consequence of her denial of allegations 1 and 2, the panel also approached allegation 3 as if it was denied.

C. Preliminary applications

Application to amend

The panel allowed an application on the part of the presenting officer for an amendment to allegation 1.

The original wording of allegation 1, namely, “You dictated answers to student during the assessment,” was amended to, “She provided students with an answer sheet and directed students to include in their response to the Controlled Assessment the terms in bold in the answer sheet.”

The panel concluded that such an amendment did not cause prejudice to Ms Wood and that such an amendment was in the interests of a fair hearing. Furthermore, Ms Gill did not object to the application.

Additional documents

The presenting officer applied to the panel for leave to introduce a document entitled, ‘Instructions for Conducting Controlled Assessments (GCSE qualifications)’ and a document entitled, ‘Controlled Assessment Guidance – GCSE History Specification B’.

Ms Gill did not object and the panel concluded that it would be helpful for the documents to be available in the course of the hearing. Consequently, the application was allowed. The documents would be described as Bundle B and Bundle C.

Public/Private

In the course of the hearing, Ms Gill applied for certain elements of the evidence relating to Ms Wood’s medical condition to be heard in private. The presenting officer did not object. The panel decided that it was in the interests of justice and it was not contrary to the public interest for that part of the hearing when evidence relating to Ms Wood’s medical condition was to be considered to be heard in private.

D. Summary of evidence

Documents

In advance of the hearing, the panel received a bundle of documents which included:

Section 1: Chronology of events with page numbers 2 to 3

Section 2: Notice of Proceedings and Response with page numbers 5 to 11

Section 3: NCTL witness statements with page numbers 13 to 21

Section 4: NCTL documents with page numbers 23 to 123

Section 5: Teacher documents with page numbers 125 to 229

In addition, for the reasons outlined above, the panel agreed to accept the following:

Bundle B pages 1 to 34 and Bundle C pages 1 to 8.

The panel members confirmed that, other than Bundles B and C, they had read all of the documents in advance of the hearing.

Witnesses

The panel heard oral evidence from:

- Witness A (teaching assistant)
- Pupil A (former pupil of Ms Wood)
- Witness B (AQA Investigator)
- Helen Wood

E. Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

We have now carefully considered the case before us and have reached a decision.

We confirm that we have read all the documents provided in the bundle in advance of the hearing together with the additional documents provided.

Brief summary

Haydock High School is a secondary school with some 500 pupils.

In the academic year 2013/2014, Ms Wood, who joined the school in September 2002, was employed as a history teacher in the Humanities Department.

In March 2014, in the course of the controlled assessments in history undertaken by Year 11 pupils, it is alleged that Ms Wood provided an inappropriate level of assistance to pupils.

Findings of fact

Our findings of fact are as follows:

We have found the following particulars of the allegations against you proven, for these reasons:

- 1. You provided students with an answer sheet and directed students to include in their response to the Controlled Assessment the terms in bold in the answer sheet.**

It was brought to the attention of the school that Ms Wood may have been providing an inappropriate level of assistance to pupils in the analysis and evaluation phase of task taking in the course of the controlled assessment in history.

Controlled assessments are required to be conducted in accordance with the document entitled 'Instructions for Conducting Controlled Assessments (GCSE qualifications)' (Bundle B) which stipulates that "If a high level of control is specified, you must not provide advice or feedback of any description" (Bundle B page 9); this phase is one where a "high level of control" is required.

Witness B, who the panel found to be a reliable witness, stated that no assistance should be provided to pupils in the course of a task where a high level of control is required. Ms Wood confirmed that she was aware of the requirements of the AQA examination board which would include compliance with the 'Instructions for Conducting Controlled Assessments'.

In an answer sheet prepared by Ms Wood, also known as a SWIPE sheet (page 49), relating to a source entitled 'Women of Britain say go', certain words are typed in bold print. It was alleged that the answer sheet was distributed by Ms Wood to the pupils and that she directed them to include in their response to the controlled assessment those words typed in bold. At the outset of the hearing, Ms Wood admitted the allegation and she accepted throughout that she had provided an inappropriate level of support to the pupils.

By contrast, in the course of her evidence, Ms Wood stated that, rather than directing the pupils to include the words in bold verbatim, the pupils should use their own words to convey the meaning of the words in bold.

However, in paragraph 8 of her statement of 20 February 2015 (pages 205-206), Ms Wood states as follows, “I gave the sheets out and told them how to use them – the words in bold were phrases and information that had to be written into their Controlled Assessment work.”

In the course of investigating the allegation of malpractice on the part of Ms Wood, the school reviewed the work of the pupils who had completed the history controlled assessment. It was discovered that, in the pupils’ answers concerning the source entitled ‘Women of Britain say go’, there were striking and multiple similarities between the pupils’ work and this is summarised in a document prepared by the headteacher (pages 47 to 48). The similarities related to the inclusion of the words typed by Ms Wood in bold in the answer sheet which she had distributed to the pupils.

In the circumstances, the panel was satisfied that Ms Wood failed to apply the statutory controlled assessment conditions during a Modern World controlled assessment in that she provided students with an answer sheet and directed students to include in their response to the controlled assessment the terms in bold in the answer sheet.

The panel therefore found this allegation proved.

2. You supported a student, Pupil A, in his response to the assessment by providing him with written documentation.

It was accepted by Ms Wood that she had provided Pupil A with an inappropriate amount of support in the completion of his response in respect of a source entitled ‘Remember Scarborough’.

However, she denied that she had written out the response in her own words (pages 45 and 46) and then handed the document to Pupil A for him to type out. Ms Wood stated that she had asked Pupil A a series of questions and she had then written down his answers which formed the basis of the response which, save for the last four lines, was in Ms Wood’s handwriting.

Pupil A, who the panel also found to be a reliable and credible witness, gave evidence via video link and confirmed that he went to Ms Wood for assistance with the task. He agreed that, at the outset, Ms Wood asked him some questions and she would then write down his answers but that she would also write, “extras” which were in her own words and which were her own ideas. Pupil A confirmed that he did not expect this level of support. In fact, Pupil A stated, and the panel found, that, “...only little bits...” were the words of Pupil A.

From the sentence which starts, “The public is reminded that...” down to four lines up from the bottom, the panel accepted Pupil A’s evidence and found as a fact that he did not contribute any of the content. Having written out the response, Ms Wood then instructed Pupil A to type it out so that it could form part of his controlled assessment.

In the circumstances, the panel was satisfied that Ms Wood had failed to apply the statutory controlled assessment conditions during a Modern World controlled assessment in that she supported a student, Pupil A, in his response to the assessment by providing him with written documentation.

On this basis, the panel found this allegation proved.

3. In so doing 1 and 2 above you acted dishonestly.

Ms Wood had accepted that, on the basis of her own admissions, she had acted dishonestly.

However, whilst acknowledging this acceptance, the panel assessed whether, on the basis of the facts as found in respect of allegations 1 and 2, Ms Wood had acted dishonestly.

The panel was satisfied that, by the standards of reasonable and honest people, the instruction by Ms Wood to pupils to include in their responses the level and extent of content which had been prepared by her as if it were the work of the pupils themselves, amounted to dishonest conduct.

The panel was also satisfied that Ms Wood knew that, by those standards, her conduct was dishonest. She knew that, by providing this level of support, the work would not accurately reflect the ability of the pupils and would provide a misleading picture to those with responsibility for the assessment and moderation of such work.

As for the amount and manner of the support she provided to Pupil A, again this was at such a level that any reasonable and honest person would conclude that Ms Wood had acted dishonestly.

Furthermore, Ms Wood must have known that the proportion of the response which had been provided by her would mean that it could not possibly reflect the ability of Pupil A. This was an attempt to inflate the level of achievement of the pupil which would be completely inaccurate and misleading.

The panel was satisfied that Ms Wood knew that, by the standards of reasonable and honest people, her conduct was dishonest.

Consequently, the panel found this allegation proved.

Findings as to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute

The panel found that the facts found proved in respect of allegations 1 to 3 constituted 'unacceptable professional conduct', in that such conduct was of a serious nature and fell significantly short of the standard of behaviour expected of a teacher. For the same reasons, the panel found that such conduct may bring the profession into disrepute.

In making this finding, the panel had found that Ms Wood's conduct represented significant breaches of the Teachers' Standards.

Ms Wood had:

- (a) Failed to act with honesty and integrity. The panel had found Ms Wood to have acted dishonestly. Furthermore, she had put at risk the integrity of the GCSE examination process, endeavouring to place her pupils at an advantage when compared with pupils in her school and other schools whose teachers had adhered to the instructions provided for the conduct of controlled assessments;
- (b) In acting in this way, failed to uphold the proper standards expected of a teacher and had put at risk the reputation of the profession and the trust of the public in the profession. The assessment process is fundamental to measuring educational achievement in pupils. Both pupils and their parents must have confidence that assessment is being used in a completely honest, appropriate and transparent way by all teachers adhering to the required regulations for handling pupils' assessed work. Any departure from this reflects on the integrity of the process and not only damages the perceptions of the pupils and public but also the reputation of the profession;
- (c) Ms Wood had failed to maintain a high standard of ethics and behaviour, had not had proper regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school and had not acted within the statutory frameworks which set out a teacher's professional duties and responsibilities.

Panel's recommendation to the Secretary of State

The panel gave very serious consideration to the mitigation put forward by and on behalf of Ms Wood in the knowledge that she is a person of previous good character.

The mitigation effectively fell into two parts: first, the conduct of other teachers within her department both in terms of the pressure they brought to bear on Ms Wood and her assertion that they had behaved in exactly the same way as her in relation to the

inappropriate level of support provided to pupils. Secondly, the ill-health from which Ms Wood suffered.

In the course of the investigation by AQA into the conduct of Ms Wood, she was informed of the nature of the allegations against her and she was invited to respond. Ms Wood provided a lengthy response, detailing how others had themselves manipulated the results of the controlled assessments of the pupils in their care and that this had also pervaded the entire department.

Ms Wood also described how her line manager had indicated that if anyone divulged this information, all of their jobs would be at risk. Furthermore, very considerable pressure was exerted on Ms Wood to ensure that the controlled assessments were completed at an earlier date than usual in order that there would be sufficient time to manipulate the results if that proved necessary.

However, on receipt of these counter-allegations, Witness B from AQA and a colleague carried out extensive investigations to include interviews of all relevant personnel and an analysis of the controlled assessments of the pupils of two other teachers.

The outcome of their investigations was that they found no evidence of malpractice on the part of any other member of staff. There were no similarities between pupils' work on anything like the scale found in the assessments of Ms Wood's pupils. Furthermore, the results of the pupils did not in fact compare particularly favourably with other assessment centres and that the results were not markedly different to those achieved by the school in previous years.

The panel did not doubt that Ms Wood's role was a pressurised one, that there were many demands being made of her and that she found it very difficult to cope. The panel also accepted that Ms Wood, whilst receiving support from certain members of staff, did not consider that she was receiving the support from her line management to which she believed she was entitled.

This was linked with the state of her health.

[Redacted]

The panel was satisfied that Ms Wood's health issues were genuine.

The panel was also satisfied that Ms Wood understood the nature of her wrongdoing and had shown a level of insight, although the panel had concerns that there was a lack of recognition of the true extent of her misconduct. Ms Wood had expressed remorse for any adverse effect her conduct may have had on pupils and the school.

The panel had to weigh against such factors the seriousness of the allegations found proved and the significant consequences of such conduct.

All considerations with regard to the public interest were engaged, namely: protection of pupils; the maintenance of public confidence in the profession; and upholding proper standards of conduct.

Ms Wood's actions represented a serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers' Standards. They amounted to an abuse of trust and Ms Wood had been found to be dishonest. Her behaviour, which was deliberate, undermined pupils, the profession and the school.

The panel concluded that, whilst it had sympathy for Ms Wood's medical condition, the only proportionate and appropriate outcome was for it to recommend to the Secretary of State that a prohibition order should be imposed. In the interests of the profession, pupils and the public, the integrity of the examination process was absolutely paramount. Furthermore, the panel was not satisfied that there was no risk of a repetition of such behaviour if Ms Wood were to be allowed to continue teaching.

The panel further considered whether to recommend that Ms Wood should be able to apply for the prohibition order to be set aside after a specified period or whether there should be no such provision.

On balance, the panel recommended that, taking account of the nature and seriousness of the conduct giving rise to the allegations and for the reasons outlined above, Ms Wood should not be entitled to apply in the future for the prohibition order to be set aside.

Decision and reasons on behalf of the Secretary of State

I have carefully considered the panel's findings and recommendations in this case. The panel have found all the allegations proven and consider the facts to amount to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

The facts of this case are that Ms Wood failed to apply the statutory controlled assessment conditions during a controlled assessment and that in doing so she acted dishonestly.

In considering whether it would be appropriate and proportionate to impose a prohibition order the panel have found a number of public interest considerations to be relevant in this case, namely, the upholding and declaring of proper standards of conduct, the protection of pupils and the maintenance of public confidence in the profession.

They have given full consideration to the mitigation offered including Ms Wood's health issues. However, her actions amounted to an abuse of trust and Ms Wood had been found to be dishonest. Her behaviour, which was deliberate, undermined pupils, the profession and the school.

In the circumstances I agree with the panel's recommendation that a prohibition order is both appropriate and proportionate in this case.

In view of the general seriousness of Ms Wood's actions and specifically that her actions were dishonest, I agree that the order should be without the opportunity for Ms Wood to apply to have it set aside.

This means that Ms Helen Louise Wood is prohibited from teaching indefinitely and cannot teach in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children's home in England. Furthermore, in view of the seriousness of the allegations found proved against her, I have decided that Ms Helen Louise Wood shall not be entitled to apply for restoration of her eligibility to teach.

This order takes effect from the date on which it is served on the teacher.

Ms Helen Louise Wood has a right of appeal to the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court within 28 days from the date she is given notice of this order.

NAME OF DECISION MAKER: Paul Heathcote

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P Heathcote', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Date: 20 May 2015

This decision is taken by the decision maker named above on behalf of the Secretary of State.