

Mr Stewart Lindsay: Professional conduct panel outcome

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

December 2020

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

Teacher: Mr Stewart Lindsay

Teacher ref number: 1665548

Teacher date of birth: 24 June 1983

TRA reference: 17451

Date of determination: 4 December 2020

Former employer: Runwell Community Primary School

Introduction

A professional conduct panel ("the panel") of the Teaching Regulation Agency ("the TRA") convened in a virtual meeting, to consider the case of Mr Stewart Lindsay.

The panel members were Ms Alison Platts (lay panellist – in the chair), Mr Alex Osiatynski (teacher panellist) and Ms Sonia Simms (lay panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Mrs Luisa Gibbons of Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP solicitors.

In advance of the meeting, after taking into consideration the public interest and the interests of justice, the TRA agreed to a request from Mr Lindsay that the allegations be considered without a hearing. Mr Lindsay provided a signed Statement of Agreed Facts and admitted unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. The panel considered the case at a meeting without the attendance of the presenting officer, Ms Fiona Butler of Browne Jacobson LLP, Mr Lindsay, or his representative Ms Marallee Bernard.

The meeting took place in private. The panel's decision was recorded.

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the Notice of Meeting dated 2 November 2020.

It was alleged that Mr Lindsay was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, in that:

Whilst employed as a teacher at Runwell Primary School he:

- 1. On or around the 22 June 2018, accessed an online video conference and was found to be present whilst other users streamed videos of child sexual abuse
- 2. On or around the 9 August 2018, he was arrested on suspicion of Child-Indecent Images.

In his response to the notice of referral form, Mr Lindsay accepted the facts of the allegations. In a Statement of Agreed Facts, Mr Lindsay accepted that the facts admitted amount to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Preliminary applications

The panel noted that since the date of the referral to the TRA in this case, new Teacher Misconduct Disciplinary procedures for the teaching profession were published in May 2020 (the "May 2020 Procedures"). The panel understands that the earlier provisions contained within the Teacher misconduct disciplinary procedures for the teaching profession updated in April 2018 (the "April 2018 Procedures") apply to this case, given that those provisions applied when the referral was made. Although the panel has the power to direct that the May 2020 Procedures should apply in the interests of justice or the public interest, the panel had received no representations that this should be the case. For the avoidance of doubt, therefore, the panel confirms that it has applied the April 2018 Procedures in this case.

The panel noted that the allegations appeared to contain a typographical error in referring to an online video "reference", rather than an online video "conference". The panel sought representations from Mr Lindsay and the TRA and both confirmed that the allegations ought to refer to an online video "conference". The panel considered that the amendment was necessary to correct this typographical error and that it does not change the nature, scope or seriousness of the allegations. There was no prospect of Mr Lindsay's case being presented differently had the amendment been made at an earlier stage, and therefore no unfairness or prejudice caused to Mr Lindsay.

Summary of evidence

Documents

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

Section 1: Chronology - pages 1 - 2

Section 2: Notice of Referral, Response to Notice of Referral and Notice of Meeting – pages 3 -11

Section 3: Statement of Agreed Facts and Presenting Officer Representations – pages 12 - 16

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents - pages 17 - 94

Section 5: Teacher documents - pages 95 - 145

Statement of agreed facts

The panel considered a Statement of Agreed Facts which was signed by Mr Lindsay on 3 August 2020.

Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

The panel carefully considered the case and reached a decision.

In advance of the meeting, the TRA agreed to a request from Mr Lindsay for the allegations to be considered without a hearing. The panel had the ability to direct that the case be considered at a hearing if required in the interests of justice or in the public interest. The panel did not determine that such a direction was necessary or appropriate in this case.

Mr Lindsay was employed as a teacher at Runwell Primary School (the "School") from 17 July 2017. On 9 August 2018, he was arrested and was suspended from work on 15 August 2018. On 2 May 2019, the police informed Mr Lindsay that no further action would be taken against him. On 15 August 2019, he resigned from his position at the School.

Findings of fact

The findings of fact are as follows:

The panel found the following particulars of the allegations against you proved, for these reasons:

Whilst employed as a teacher at Runwell Primary School you:

- 1) On or around the 22 June 2018, accessed an online video conference and was found to be present whilst other users streamed videos of child sexual abuse;
- 2) On or around the 9 August 2018, you were arrested on suspicion of Child-Indecent Images.

The allegations were admitted and were supported by evidence presented to the panel within the bundle. The allegation was, therefore, found proved.

On 16 August 2018, Essex Police wrote to the TRA to inform it that Mr Lindsay had been arrested "on suspicion of Child – Indecent Images". They further stated that "the circumstances that led to this were that on 22nd June 2018, it was alleged that Mr Lindsay accessed an online video conference and was found to be present whilst other users streamed videos of child sexual abuse".

During the School's disciplinary investigation, the police provided information that the internet connection at Mr Lindsay's address was used to dial into a video conferencing session where other persons were streaming a child abuse video, and that the person present remained connected to the conferencing session for around 20 minutes. The police confirmed that Mr Lindsay appeared to be the only person present at the address at the time. The police subsequently confirmed that the material streamed consisted of Category A pre-recorded videos of child sexual abuse and that to access the platform and enter a meeting, it was necessary for the user to have a display name. The police confirmed that a room number would have been required to access the meeting, which was stated to be "generally obtained by engaging with those who have similar interests on other platforms". The police also confirmed that there were 98 participants present in the meeting room that Mr Lindsay was logged into, and at least 15 of those participants had usernames indicative of a sexual interest in children.

The police also confirmed that Mr Lindsay gave a "no comment" interview and gave no information to assist the police investigation. The transcript of that interview has not been provided to the panel.

Mr Lindsay's devices were examined and no illegal content found.

When interviewed for the School's disciplinary investigation, Mr Lindsay stated that "I was at home in the evening looking at legal adult porn and through following a link on a website I went to a video site the Police were referring to, to view adult legal porn. I did not see an [sic] illegal porn of children. The video site gives multiple screens on view". He was asked whether this was "live streaming". He responded, "Yes, Facetime. Chat to someone and do legal stuff, then went to bed. Next thing I was arrested at airport". Mr Lindsay was then asked whether that was what he had told the police in the past, and Mr Lindsay said "yes". Mr Lindsay was asked "Was there more than one screen?" He

responded, "Initially. You can click on one screen to see just one person, a private one to one". He was asked whether there were any other screens running in the background and Mr Lindsay responded "I wouldn't know". He further said "I went to individual screen, no other screen. Just one person and me interacting. Just adults chatting from my interaction. Others in that space I would not know what they did". Mr Lindsay confirmed that he accessed the video chat room on his phone so that when a window was picked it filled the whole screen.

In his Statement of Agreed Facts, Mr Lindsay accepted that although he did not know of the online video depicting child sexual abuse, nor did he profess to know that he was in the presence of usernames in the chatroom of others who identified as paedophiles by the nature of their online username; he should have exercised a greater degree of care in accessing online material. Mr Lindsay indicated that although he does not recall entering "UK P" as a username, he accepts he must have done so, but denies that he held himself out to be a paedophile by the nature of his online username of "UK P" and denies that "P" stood for paedophile.

The panel noted that it has not been alleged that Mr Lindsay intended to be present whilst videos of child abuse images were streamed, and the panel has therefore made no finding in this regard.

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

Having found the allegations proved, the panel went on to consider whether the facts of those proved allegations amounted to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

In doing so, the panel had regard to the document Teacher Misconduct: The Prohibition of Teachers, which is referred to as "the Advice".

In relation to the second allegation, the panel did not consider that Mr Lindsay's arrest in itself amounted to an unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. The fact of an arrest did not indicate culpability in itself, given the fundamental principle of "innocent until proven guilty".

In respect of the first allegation, the panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Lindsay in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers' Standards. The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Mr Lindsay was in breach of the following standards:

Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by

 having regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions;

- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach, and maintain high standards in their own attendance and punctuality; and
- Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

Mr Lindsay had received safeguarding training. Mr Lindsay confirmed he had received "Keeping Children Safe in Education", the School's Child Protection Policy and the School's ICT Acceptable Use Agreement. In accessing a video conference platform that is otherwise being used to stream child sexual abuse and without due diligence as to what the video conference platform was otherwise being used for Mr Lindsay breached:

- the obligation upon everyone working with children to keep children safe.
- The School's ICT Acceptable Use Agreement which required Mr Lindsay to ensure that his online activity, both in school and outside school, would not bring his professional role into disrepute.

Further, Mr Lindsay failed to demonstrate his appreciation that Schools and their staff are an important part of the wider safeguarding system for children.

With Mr Lindsay's knowledge and training regarding safeguarding, Mr Lindsay ought to have known the risk it posed, when he accessed the online video conference.

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Lindsay fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The panel also considered whether Mr Lindsay's conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences listed on pages 10 and 11 of the Advice.

The panel found that the offence of taking, making, possessing, distributing or publishing any indecent photograph or image or pseudo photograph or image of a child, or permitting any such activity, including one-off incidents was not relevant because it is not alleged nor is there any finding that Mr Lindsay viewed the images.

The panel noted that the allegations took place outside the education setting. It has affected the way Mr Lindsay fulfilled his teaching role as it led to his suspension from the School. Failing to exercise due diligence when accessing the online video conference risked him being present whilst others streamed videos of children being harmed.

Accordingly, the panel was satisfied that Mr Lindsay was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct.

The panel took into account of the way the teaching profession is viewed by others and considered the influence that teachers may have on pupils, parents and others in the community. The panel also took account of the uniquely influential role that teachers can

hold in pupils' lives and the fact that pupils must be able to view teachers as role models in the way they behave.

The findings of misconduct were serious and the conduct displayed would be likely to have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher, potentially damaging the public perception.

The panel therefore found that Mr Lindsay's actions constituted conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Having found the facts of particulars 1 and 2 proved, the panel further found that Mr Lindsay's conduct in respect of the first particular amounted to both unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Panel's recommendation to the Secretary of State

Given the panel's findings in respect of unacceptable professional conduct/conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, it was necessary for the panel to go on to consider whether it would be appropriate to recommend the imposition of a prohibition order by the Secretary of State.

In considering whether to recommend to the Secretary of State that a prohibition order should be made, the panel had to consider whether it would be an appropriate and proportionate measure, and whether it would be in the public interest to do so. Prohibition orders should not be given in order to be punitive, or to show that blame has been apportioned, although they are likely to have punitive effect.

The panel had regard to the particular public interest considerations set out in the Advice and, having done so, found a number of them to be relevant in this case, namely the protection of pupils; the maintenance of public confidence in the profession; and declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct.

In the light of the panel's findings against Mr Lindsay which involved failing to exercise proper care in accessing material online, there was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the protection of pupils given the seriously harmful effects on children who were and remain victims of online activity by those using the video conference facility accessed by Mr Lindsay.

Similarly, the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Lindsay were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession.

The panel decided that a strong public interest consideration in declaring proper standards of conduct in the profession was also present as the conduct found against Mr Lindsay was outside that which could reasonably be tolerated.

Although there was a public interest consideration in retaining the teacher in the profession given his ability as an educator, the panel considered that Mr Lindsay's demonstrable failure to follow proper safeguarding and the risks that this entails outweighed any advantages in retaining Mr Lindsay in the profession.

Notwithstanding the clear public interest considerations that were present, the panel considered carefully whether or not it would be proportionate to impose a prohibition order, taking into account the effect that this would have on Mr Lindsay.

In carrying out the balancing exercise, the panel had regard to the public interest considerations both in favour of, and against, prohibition as well as the interests of Mr Lindsay. The panel took further account of the Advice, which suggests that a prohibition order may be appropriate if certain behaviours of a teacher have been proved. In the list of such behaviours, that which is relevant in this case is "serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers' Standards".

Even though the behaviour found proved in this case indicated that a prohibition order would be appropriate, the panel went on to consider the mitigating factors. Mitigating factors may indicate that a prohibition order would not be appropriate or proportionate.

In the light of the panel's findings that Mr Lindsay failed to exercise due care when accessing a video chat room, and thereby failed to ensure that children were properly safeguarded, the panel took the following into account:

- his access of the video chat room was deliberate, although there is no agreement between the parties that in accessing the video chat room, Mr Lindsay intended to view any images of children, nor has the panel been asked to find that this was his intention;
- there was no evidence to suggest that Mr Lindsay was acting under duress; and
- Mr Lindsay did have a previously good history in teaching, albeit Mr Lindsay had not been in the profession for many years.

The panel has seen three character testimonials (including one [redacted]) attesting to Mr Lindsay being kind and caring, his professionalism when instructing dance to children outside of school, his dedication to becoming a teacher and his commitment to education. The panel has also seen observations of Mr Lindsay's teaching which included describing him as having "grown into an outstanding teacher who is able to move forward individual's learning in a creative way"; as having "lovely relationships with children – "super happy"; and "You have a very good classroom presence and manner with the children, you will make an outstanding teacher, well done"; and "excellent engagement". A reference prepared by the School confirmed that during his time at the School, Mr Lindsay taught year 1 pupils working alongside a colleague in order to make planned provision for learning and in his second year, he undertook responsibility for the leadership of the creative arts provision across the School.

The panel did not place any reliance upon a reference from a class teacher since Mr Lindsay had only spent one week in her class for work experience back in March 2015.

The panel has seen the outcome of Mr Lindsay's probation period whilst working as an Assessment Co-Ordinator, a position he has taken since 9 January 2020. Mr Lindsay was confirmed in this role, and the comments state that Mr Lindsay has become an asset to the team and attested to the praise he has received of his performance and attitude. He is described as having a unique and diverse range of assessment and qualification knowledge.

The panel first considered whether it would be proportionate to conclude this case with no recommendation of prohibition, considering whether the publication of the findings made by the panel would be sufficient.

Mr Lindsay has explained that, at the time of the incident, he was single and lonely and wished to seek adult company online. Safeguarding of children however, is the most fundamental tenet of the profession. The panel was concerned that Mr Lindsay's remorse related to the situation he had put himself in, rather than the devastatingly harmful effects on children.

The panel was of the view that, applying the standard of the ordinary intelligent citizen, it would not be a proportionate and appropriate response to recommend no prohibition order. Recommending that the publication of adverse findings was sufficient would unacceptably compromise the public interest considerations present in this case, despite the severity of the consequences for Mr Lindsay of prohibition.

The panel was of the view that prohibition was both proportionate and appropriate. The panel decided that the public interest considerations outweighed the interests of Mr Lindsay. The ordinary intelligent citizen would not expect that a teacher would take such significant risks in their online activity given the magnitude of trust that is placed in the teaching profession and the primacy of child protection in the role of a teacher. Accordingly, the panel made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that a prohibition order should be imposed with immediate effect.

The panel went on to consider whether or not it would be appropriate to recommend that a review period of the order should be considered. The panel was mindful that the Advice states that a prohibition order applies for life, but there may be circumstances, in any given case, that may make it appropriate to allow a teacher to apply to have the prohibition order reviewed after a specified period of time that may not be less than 2 years.

The panel found that Mr Lindsay was responsible for accessing an online conference while others present were accessing child abuse images.

This is not a case in which a future panel could have any confidence in Mr Lindsay's remediation given the extent of the risk that he was prepared to take without due regard

for safeguarding. The panel was concerned that Mr Lindsay gave inconsistent and vague accounts. For example, he stated during the School's disciplinary investigation that he had told the police that he had provided an explanation of his activity, but the police confirmed that he had provided a no comment interview. This did not give the panel confidence in Mr Lindsay's assurances as to the way he would conduct himself in the future.

The panel decided that the findings indicated a situation in which a review period would not be appropriate and, as such, decided that it would be proportionate in all the circumstances for the prohibition order to be recommended without provisions for a review period. Despite his good, albeit short, record as a teacher, this matter is so serious and safeguarding so central to the profession, that a recommendation that prohibition without provision for a review is necessary to maintain confidence in the profession.

Decision and reasons on behalf of the Secretary of State

I have given very careful consideration to this case and to the recommendation of the panel in respect of both sanction and review period.

In considering this case, I have also given very careful attention to the Advice that the Secretary of State has published concerning the prohibition of teachers.

In this case, the panel has found the allegations proven and found that those proven facts amount to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

The panel has made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that Mr Stewart Lindsay should be the subject of a prohibition order, with no provision for a review period.

In particular, the panel has found that Mr Lindsay is in breach of the following standards:

Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by

 having regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions;

Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach, and maintain high standards in their own attendance and punctuality; and

Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

The panel finds that the conduct of Mr Lindsay fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The findings of misconduct are extremely serious as they include a finding of accessing an online video chat room whilst others streamed videos of child sexual abuse and that Mr Lindsay was since arrested on suspicion of Child-Indecent images. Although he stated he did not know of the online video depicting child sexual abuse, he should have exercised a greater degree of care accessing online material and that led to a failure to ensure that children were properly safeguarded.

I have to determine whether the imposition of a prohibition order is proportionate and in the public interest. In considering that for this case, I have considered the overall aim of a prohibition order which is to protect pupils and to maintain public confidence in the profession. I have considered the extent to which a prohibition order in this case would achieve that aim taking into account the impact that it will have on the individual teacher. I have also asked myself, whether a less intrusive measure, such as the published finding of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, would itself be sufficient to achieve the overall aim. I have to consider whether the consequences of such a publication are themselves sufficient. I have considered therefore whether or not prohibiting Mr Lindsay, and the impact that will have on him, is proportionate and in the public interest.

In this case, I have considered the extent to which a prohibition order would protect children. The panel has observed, "failing to exercise proper care in accessing material online, there was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the protection of pupils given the seriously harmful effects on children who were and remain victims of online activity by those using the video conference facility accessed by Mr Lindsay". A prohibition order would therefore prevent such a risk from being present in the future.

I have also taken into account the panel's comments on insight and remorse, which the panel sets out as follows, "Mr Lindsay accepted that although he did not know of the online video depicting child sexual abuse, nor did he profess to know that he was in the presence of usernames in the chatroom of others who identified as paedophiles by the nature of their online username; he should have exercised a greater degree of care" and "Mr Lindsay explained that, at the time of the incident, he was single and lonely and wished to seek adult company online. Safeguarding of children however, is the most fundamental tenet of the profession. The panel was concerned that Mr Lindsay's remorse related to the situation he had put himself in, rather than the devastatingly harmful effects on children". The panel has also commented that the police confirmed that Mr Lindsay gave a "no comment" interview and gave no information to assist the police investigation. In my judgement, the lack of insight means that there is some risk of the repetition of this behaviour and that a failure to protect children who were and remain victims of such online activity. I have therefore given this element considerable weight in reaching my decision.

I have gone on to consider the extent to which a prohibition order would maintain public confidence in the profession. The panel observe, "the findings of misconduct were serious and the conduct displayed would be likely to have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher, potentially damaging the public perception".

I am particularly mindful of the finding of a failure to safeguard children in this case and the impact that such a finding has on the reputation of the profession.

I have had to consider that the public has a high expectation of professional standards of all teachers and that the public might regard a failure to impose a prohibition order as a failure to uphold those high standards. In weighing these considerations, I have had to consider the matter from the point of view of an "ordinary intelligent and well-informed citizen."

I have considered whether the publication of a finding of unacceptable professional conduct, in the absence of a prohibition order, can itself be regarded by such a person as being a proportionate response to the misconduct that has been found proven in this case.

I have also considered the impact of a prohibition order on Mr Lindsay himself, who I understand resigned from his position in the School. The panel saw a number of character statements attesting to Mr Lindsay being "kind and caring, his professionalism when instructing dance to children outside of school, his dedication to becoming a teacher and his commitment to education" and "Mr Lindsay has become an asset to the team and attested to the praise he has received of his performance and attitude. He is described as having a unique and diverse range of assessment and qualification knowledge". A prohibition order would prevent Mr Lindsay from teaching. A prohibition order would also clearly deprive the public of his contribution to the profession for the period that it is in force.

I have also placed considerable weight on the finding of the panel that Mr Lindsay had received safeguarding training, including "Keeping Children Safe in Education" and the Schools ICT agreement. By accessing an online platform being used to stream videos of child sexual abuse, without taking effective due diligence steps to understand what that platform was used for, Mr Lindsay breached the obligation upon everyone working with children to keep children safe and failed to ensure his online activity, both in school and outside school, would not bring his professional role into disrepute. In addition I noted the panel's comment "Mr Lindsay failed to demonstrate his appreciation that Schools and their staff are an important part of the wider safeguarding system for children".

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Mr Lindsay has made to the profession. In my view, it is necessary to impose a prohibition order in order to maintain public confidence in the profession. A published decision, in light of the circumstances in this case, that is not fully backed up by remorse

or insight, does not in my view satisfy the public interest requirement concerning public confidence in the profession.

For these reasons, I have concluded that a prohibition order is proportionate and in the public interest in order to achieve the intended aims of a prohibition order.

I have gone on to consider the matter of a review period. In this case, the panel has recommended that no provision should be made for a review period.

I have considered the panel's comments;

"This is not a case in which a future panel could have any confidence in Mr Lindsay's remediation given the extent of the risk that he was prepared to take without due regard for safeguarding. The panel was concerned that Mr Lindsay gave inconsistent and vague accounts".

"Despite his good, albeit short, record as a teacher, this matter is so serious and safeguarding so central to the profession, that a recommendation that prohibition without provision for a review is necessary to maintain confidence in the profession".

I have given careful consideration to the published Advice concerning the prohibition of teachers, which includes a consideration that a prohibition order is imposed with no provision for the teacher to apply for it to be set aside if the case involved "any activity involving viewing, taking, making, possessing, distributing or publishing any indecent photograph or image or pseudo photograph or image of a child". Although the panel have not reported that Mr Lindsay was convicted of Child-Indecent images, his actions put children at harm and he failed to demonstrate he understood the seriousness of the safeguarding risks involved.

I consider therefore that allowing for no review period is necessary to maintain public confidence and is proportionate and in the public interest.

This means that Mr Stewart Lindsay 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 him, I have decided that Mr Lindsay shall not be entitled to apply for restoration of his eligibility to teach.

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

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Mr Lindsay has a right of appeal to the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court within 28 days from the date he is given notice of this order.

Decision maker: Sarah Buxcey

Date: 9 December 2020

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