



National College for
Teaching & Leadership

Laura Jayne Travis: Professional Conduct Panel outcome

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

July 2014

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Professional Conduct Panel decision and recommendations, and decision on behalf of the Secretary of State

Teacher:	Ms Laura Jayne Travis
Teacher ref no:	0762837
Teacher date of birth:	12 August 1986
NCTL Case ref no:	11146
Date of Determination:	4 July 2014
Former employer:	Crookhorn College, Waterlooville

A. Introduction

A Professional Conduct Panel (“the Panel”) of the National College for Teaching and Leadership (“the National College”) convened on 4 July 2014 at 53-55 Butts Road, Earlsdon Park, Coventry, CV1 3BH to consider the case of Ms Laura Jayne Travis.

The Panel members were Kathy Thomson (Teacher Panellist– in the Chair), Mike Carter (Teacher Panellist) and Nicole Jackson (Lay Panellist).

The Legal Adviser to the Panel was Peter Shervington of Eversheds LLP, Solicitors.

The Presenting Officer for the National College was Louisa Atkin of Browne Jacobson Solicitors. The Presenting Officer was not present as this was a meeting.

Ms Travis was not present or represented.

The meeting took place in private. The decision as to facts and unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute was announced in public and was recorded.

B. Allegations

The Panel considered the allegations set out in the Notice of Proceedings dated 2 June 2014.

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

1. Whilst working at Crookhorn College during the 2008/09 academic year she:
 - a. gave her personal mobile number to Pupil A in or around May 2009;
 - b. exchanged text messages and phone calls with Pupil A, which included communications of a sexual nature, between May 2009 and the end of the school term;
 - c. allowed Pupil A to visit her whilst at her home and kissed and cuddled with her
2. She engaged in a sexual relationship with Pupil A which commenced in the summer of 2009, shortly after the 2008/09 academic year had ended.

C. Preliminary applications

There were no preliminary applications

D. Summary of evidence

Documents

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

Section 1: Anonymised pupil list	Page 2
Section 2: Notice of Referral, response and notice of meeting	Pages 4-7
Section 3: Statement of Agreed Facts/representations	Pages 9-12
Section 4: NCTL Documents	Pages 14-27
Section 5: Teacher Documents	Pages 29-39

The Panel Members confirmed that they had read all of the documents in advance of the hearing.

Witnesses

Convened as a meeting, the Panel heard no oral evidence.

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.

Summary of Evidence

A Statement of Agreed Facts has been signed by Ms Travis on 28 April 2014 and by the Presenting Officer on 2 May 2014. The Statement of Agreed Facts confirmed that Ms Travis admitted the facts of the allegations against her and that they amount to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

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. Whilst working at Crookhorn College during the 2008/09 academic year you:**
 - a. gave your personal mobile number to Pupil A in or around May 2009;**

The Statement of Agreed Facts confirms that Ms Travis admits this allegation against her. The Panel has applied its independent mind to the matter. The Panel has considered all the evidence before it and has had particular regard to the detailed statement of facts provided by Ms Travis starting at page 23 of the Bundle. Taking into account all the evidence, and the admission that has been made, the panel finds that this allegation is proven.

- b. exchanged text messages and phone calls with Pupil A, which included communications of a sexual nature, between May 2009 and the end of the school term;**

The Statement of Agreed Facts confirms that Ms Travis admits this allegation against her. The Panel has applied its independent mind to the matter. The Panel has considered all the evidence before it and has had particular regard to the detailed statement of facts

provided by Ms Travis starting at page 23 of the Bundle. Taking into account all the evidence, and the admission that has been made, the panel finds that this allegation is proven.

c. allowed Pupil A to visit you whilst at your home and kissed and cuddled with her

The Statement of Agreed Facts confirms that Ms Travis admits this allegation against her. The Panel has applied its independent mind to the matter. The Panel has considered all the evidence before it and has had particular regard to the detailed statement of facts provided by Ms Travis starting at page 23 of the Bundle. Taking into account all the evidence, and the admission that has been made, the panel finds that this allegation is proven.

2. You engaged in a sexual relationship with Pupil A which commenced in the summer of 2009, shortly after the 2008/09 academic year had ended.

The Statement of Agreed Facts confirms that Ms Travis admits this allegation against her. The Panel has applied its independent mind to the matter. The Panel has considered all the evidence before it and has had particular regard to the detailed statement of facts provided by Ms Travis starting at page 23 of the Bundle. Taking into account all the evidence, and the admission that has been made, the panel finds that this allegation is proven.

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

In the Statement of Agreed Facts, Ms Travis admitted that the facts of the allegations amount to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

In considering the allegations that the Panel has found proven, the Panel has had regard to the definitions in The Teacher Misconduct – Prohibition of Teachers Advice, which the Panel refers to as the ‘Guidance’.

The Panel is satisfied that the conduct of Ms Travis in relation to the facts found proven, involved breaches of the Teachers’ Standards. The Panel considers that by reference to Part Two, Ms Travis is in breach of the following standards:

- Teachers are expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct.
- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by:

treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, and at all times observing proper boundaries appropriate to a teacher's professional position;

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

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

The Panel is satisfied that the conduct of Ms Travis fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The Panel considers that the conduct admitted exposed a pupil to behaviour which could have been harmful. Accordingly, the Panel is satisfied that Ms Travis is guilty of unacceptable professional conduct.

The Panel has taken into account how the teaching profession is viewed by others and has considered the influence that teachers may have on pupils, parents and others in the community. The Panel has taken account of the uniquely influential role that teachers can hold in pupil's lives and that pupils must be able to view teachers as role models in the way that they behave.

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

The Panel therefore finds that the Teacher's actions constitute 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 unprofessional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, it is 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.

The Panel has not received any specific indication from the Presenting Officer as to Ms Travis' previous good character, although the Panel has no reason to doubt Ms Travis's previous good character. Although the Panel has not been provided with any professional references, it has been referred to character statements from four friends of Ms Travis:

- Individual A
- Individual B
- Individual C
- Individual D

In considering whether to recommend to the Secretary of State that a Prohibition Order should be made, the Panel has to consider whether it is an appropriate and proportionate measure, and whether it is 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 has considered the particular public interest considerations set out in the Teacher Misconduct – Prohibition of Teachers Advice and having done so has found a number of them to be relevant in this case, namely

- the protection of pupils
- the maintenance of public confidence in the profession
- declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct.

The Panel found that Ms Travis had engaged in inappropriate contact with a pupil on a number of occasions over a period of several months leading to a sexual relationship. There is a strong public interest consideration in respect of the protection of pupils, given the serious findings of an inappropriate relationship with a child. It is evident to the Panel from Ms Travis' own statement that she had several opportunities whilst the situation was developing to remove herself from it or seek advice from more experienced colleagues. The Panel notes that there were two occasions on which Ms Travis was counselled by other members of staff regarding her relationships with pupils and the importance of maintaining appropriate professional boundaries (as referred to in Ms Travis' statement at Page 29 and 30 of the Bundle). These included a meeting with her NQT mentor. Ms Travis' inappropriate behaviour continued to develop despite these interventions. It is apparent from a number of comments in her statement that Ms Travis recognises, with the benefit of hindsight, that her behaviour was inappropriate.

Similarly, the Panel considers that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Ms Travis were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession.

The Panel considered that a strong public interest consideration in declaring proper standards of conduct in the profession was also present as the conduct found against Ms Travis was outside that which could reasonably be tolerated.

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 Ms Travis. In forming a judgement in this respect, the Panel had regard to the mitigation evidence that was presented to it by Individual A, Individual B, Individual C and Individual D who consider Ms Travis to be a loyal, honest person with clear moral judgment. The Panel is also conscious that the matter only came to light as a result of Ms Travis' voluntary disclosure to a colleague. The Panel further notes that Ms Travis voluntarily presented herself at a police station in relation to the admitted behaviours and that, following enquiries, the police concluded that no criminal offence had been committed. The Panel has not been made aware of any previous criminal or disciplinary sanctions recorded against Ms Travis.

In carrying out the balancing exercise the Panel has considered the public interest considerations both in favour of and against prohibition as well as the interests of Ms Travis. The Panel took further account of the Teacher Misconduct – Prohibition of Teachers Advice, which suggests that a prohibition order may be appropriate if certain behaviours of a teacher have been proven. In the list of such behaviours are:

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the teachers' standards;
- abuse of position of trust (particularly involving vulnerable pupils);
- sexual misconduct, e.g. involving actions that were sexually motivated or of a sexual nature and/or that use or exploit the trust, knowledge or influence derived from the individual's professional position;

The Panel considers that each of the above behaviours are shown in this case.

Even though there were behaviours that would point to a Prohibition Order being appropriate, the Panel went on to consider whether or not there were sufficient mitigating factors to militate against a Prohibition Order being an appropriate and proportionate measure to impose, particularly taking into account the nature and severity of the behaviour in this case.

- The Panel finds it evident from Ms Travis' statement that her actions were deliberate. In the first instance, Ms Travis took the decision not to consult a member of staff before taking the pupil shopping in her car. She had every opportunity to decline the request made by the pupil for her mobile number. When she received an inappropriate telephone call of a sexual nature, she chose to remain on the line rather than terminating the call; neither did she report the matter to anyone. Concerns were raised by more senior members of staff and yet her behaviour continued to develop. Ms Travis records in her statement, at page 32 of the Bundle, that she was, at one stage, exchanging daily texts with the pupil. Ms Travis admitted that, 'through texting and calls I had grown very fond of [the pupil]

and a sexual relationship formed'. They subsequently agreed to meet at Ms Travis' house, and on one occasion in her car outside the school, rather than in public places.

- It is clear to the Panel from the evidence provided that Ms Travis was not acting under duress. Although in her statement Ms Travis contends that she was, 'taken advantage of' by a pupil who was, 'authority hunting' (Page 32 of the Bundle), the Panel considers that this does not reflect the professional nature of the pupil teacher relationship. The Panel does not accept that responsibility for events such as the matters in hand can properly be placed on any pupil. The very fact that Ms Travis has accepted full responsibility for her actions (in her statement at page 29 of the Bundle), is a clear indication that she cannot be said to have been under duress at the time.
- The Panel has been given no indication that Ms Travis had anything other than a good previous history. It is noted that the relevant events occurred during her NQT year and at a time when she was a relatively inexperienced teacher. However, the notes of her interview with Teaching Personnel (page 19 of the Bundle) record Ms Travis stating that she, 'had covered safeguarding and professional conduct standards during her teacher training' but that she, 'should have listened more clearly'.

More generally, the Panel has considered the explanation given by Ms Travis for her behaviour. In her statement (at page 32 of the Bundle) Ms Travis refers to living by herself, having severe financial problems and having a history of anxiety and depression. The Panel notes these observations, but considers that they are outweighed by her responsibilities as a professional.

The Panel is of the view that Prohibition is both proportionate and appropriate. The Panel has decided that the public interest considerations outweigh the interests of Ms Travis. In reaching this conclusion, the Panel has had particular regard to the fact that, whilst acknowledging responsibility, Ms Travis has sought to justify her actions by reference to her personal circumstances at the time and to the behaviour of the pupil. In this respect, Ms Travis appears to show limited insight and has not acknowledged the impact that her behaviour may have had on the pupil. Accordingly, the Panel makes 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 for it to decide to recommend that a review period of the order should be considered. The Panel was mindful that the Teacher Misconduct – Prohibition of Teachers Advice advises 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 two years.

The Teacher Misconduct – Prohibition of Teachers Advice indicates that there are behaviours that, if proven, would militate against a review period being recommended. These behaviours include an act which was sexually motivated and resulted in or had the potential to result in, harm to a person, particularly where the individual has used their professional position to influence the person.

The Panel has found that Ms Travis has been responsible for action falling within this category. It is not disputed that Ms Travis' behaviours led to a sexual relationship with the pupil. Whilst she states (page 30 of the Bundle) that she, 'stupidly got sucked into the situation', the Panel's view is that Ms Travis was an active participant in the development of the relationship and took very limited steps to prevent it. For example, by her own admission she disclosed details of her personal life to the pupil when she had no need to do so. She also agreed to meet with the pupil at her own house. The Panel considers that her actions may have had the potential to result in harm to the pupil in question.

As indicated above, the Panel considers that whilst Ms Travis has clearly expressed her remorse and regret, she has shown limited insight into the potential consequences of her actions on the pupil.

The Panel felt 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.

Decision and reasons on behalf of the Secretary of State

I have given very careful consideration to this case. I have carefully considered the recommendations of the panel in respect of sanction and review.

This case is a very serious one and involves a finding of sexual misconduct with a pupil. I am satisfied that Ms Travis' conduct involved serious breaches of the Teachers' Standards. In particular I have noted that the panel found that Ms Travis was in breach of the following standards:

- Teachers are expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct.
- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by:
 - treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, and at all times observing proper boundaries appropriate to a teacher's professional position;
 - having regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions;

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

There is little doubt that Ms Travis' conduct fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

I have considered the recommendation of the panel in respect of a sanction. I have also balanced the public interest considerations both in favour of and against prohibition as well as the interests of Ms Travis. I have taken into account the Teacher Misconduct – Prohibition of Teachers Advice, which suggests that a prohibition order may be appropriate if certain behaviours of a teacher have been proven. In the list of such behaviours are:

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the teachers' standards;
- abuse of position of trust (particularly involving vulnerable pupils);
- sexual misconduct, e.g. involving actions that were sexually motivated or of a sexual nature and/or that use or exploit the trust, knowledge or influence derived from the individual's professional position;

I agree with the panel that each of the above behaviours are shown in this case.

For the reasons given I support the recommendation that Ms Travis be prohibited.

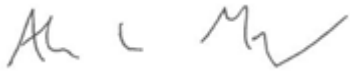
I have also carefully considered the matter of a review period. The panel have recommended that there be no review period. I have taken into account that although Ms Travis has clearly expressed her remorse and regret, she has shown limited insight into the potential consequences of her actions on the pupil. I support the view, having taken account of the guidance that there should be no review period.

This means that Ms Laura Travis 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 Laura Travis 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 Laura Travis 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: Alan Meyrick

A handwritten signature in grey ink, appearing to read 'Alan Meyrick', with a checkmark at the end.

Date: 10 July 2014

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