



National College for
Teaching & Leadership

Mr Robert F. Steadman: Professional Conduct Panel outcome

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

September 2013

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

Teacher:	Mr Robert Frederick Steadman
Teacher ref no:	88/10468
Teacher date of birth:	01/04/1965
NCTL Case ref no:	9409
Date of Determination:	27 September 2013
Former employer:	Lady Manners School, Shutts Lane, Bakewell, Derbyshire DE45 1JA.

A. Introduction

A Professional Conduct Panel (“the Panel”) of the National College for Teaching (“the National College”) and Leadership convened on 25, 26 and 27 September 2013 at 53-55 Butts Road, Earlsdon Park, Coventry, CV1 3BH to consider the case of Robert Frederick Steadman.

The Panel members were Mr Brian Hawkins (Teacher Panellist - in the Chair), Mr Peter Cooper (Teacher Panellist) and Ms Jean Carter (Lay Panellist).

The Legal Adviser to the Panel was Mr Paddy Roche of Morgan Cole LLP Solicitors, Oxford.

The Presenting Officer for the National College was Ms Laura Ryan of Kingsley Napley LLP Solicitors, London.

Mr Robert Frederick Steadman was not present and was not represented.

The hearing took place in public and was recorded.

B. Allegations

The Panel considered the allegations set out in the Notice of Proceedings dated 1 July 2013.

It was alleged that Mr Robert Frederick Steadman was guilty of Unacceptable Professional Conduct and/or Conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, in that:-

1. Between January 2010 and May 2011 he engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Student, C, which included text messages, inappropriate physical contact and meetings outside of School.
2. Between 17 March 2011 and 21 March 2011 he allowed Student C to borrow his School laptop over the weekend and disclosed his laptop password to her.
3. During March 2011 inappropriate images were downloaded onto his School laptop via software that had not been authorised for use on the laptop and these images were subsequently viewed by Student C.

The Teacher did not admit the facts.

C. Preliminary applications

In the absence of Mr Steadman the Presenting Officer made an Application for the case to proceed. The Panel decided to hear the case in the absence of Mr Steadman because he had effectively waived his right to be present. The Panel saw a written submission submitted by Mr Steadman and dated 23 September 2013 in which he said:-

“I am very sorry that I am unable to attend this hearing”.

He went on to say:-

“I do not want the case to be delayed any longer” and gave reasons asking that the case should proceed.

In addition Mr Steadman also sent an email to the National College confirming that he wanted the case to proceed.

The Presenting Officer also made an application to amend Particular 1 by substituting a commencement date of January 2010 for September 2007. The Panel decided that as the effect of this application was thus to reduce the time period covered by the Particular and prior notice of the application had been sent to Mr Steadman's representative no prejudice would be caused to the absent teacher. The Panel therefore approved the requested amendment.

D. Summary of evidence

Documents

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

Section 1.	Chronology and Anonymised Pupil List	Page Nos:	1 to 7.
Section 2.	Notice of Proceedings and Response	Page Nos:	8 to 14.
Section 3.	Teaching Agency Witness Statement	Page Nos:	15 to 44.
Section 4.	Teaching Agency Documents	Page Nos:	45 to 502.
Section 5.	Teacher Documents	Page Nos:	503 to 506.

The following additional documents were added by consent to the case papers:-

Section 6.	Statement of Robert Steadman	Page Nos:	507 to 523.
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The Panel members confirmed that they had read all of the documents in advance of the hearing.

Witnesses

The Panel heard oral evidence from the following witnesses called by the Presenting Officer on behalf of the National College:-

1. Witness A, Head Teacher at Lady Manners School, Bakewell, Derbyshire.
2. Witness B, Deputy Head Teacher at Lady Manners School, Bakewell, Derbyshire.
3. Witness C, Assistant Director of Finance (Audit), Derbyshire County Council.

No other evidence was given on behalf of the National College.

Mr Steadman's written statement pp 507 - 523 was read to the hearing by the Legal Advisor.

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 Case

The case concerns allegations that while employed as a part time Teacher of Music at Lady Manners School, Bakewell, Robert Steadman formed a relationship with Student C who was a pupil at the School which involved contact by text messaging, lending Student C his School laptop, incidents of contact with Student C out of School and finally a meeting with Student C in Buxton where inappropriate physical contact occurred between the Teacher and pupil.

In the evidence contained in the case papers various specific messages passing between the Teacher and Student C are mentioned.

In relation to Particulars 2 and 3 of the Notice of Proceedings it is alleged that between 17 and 21 March 2011 Mr Steadman allowed Student C to borrow his School laptop and disclosed his laptop password to her so that she could access the material contained on it.

It is further alleged that inappropriate images which were pornographic had been downloaded onto the School laptop in contravention of the School's IT Acceptable Use Policy and that the software installed had not been authorised and that these images were subsequently viewed by Student C.

Mr Steadman in his response denies the particulars of the allegation and asserts that he was simply trying to help Student C and that none of his conduct was inappropriate although he acknowledges that he did send some messages to Student C. He indicates that Student C has misrepresented the nature of the relationship that he had with the student. He is clear that there was no inappropriate touching at any time between the two of them. While he accepts that he did lend his School laptop to the Student he says he had no knowledge at all that there was any pornographic material or other inappropriate material contained on the laptop, that he was not responsible for downloading that material and was shocked to discover that such material had been found on the laptop. He says that the nature of his relationship with Student C was fully covered in an interview under caution with the Police who determined that no further action should be taken against him. He further asserts that the School and Local

Authority's investigation of the issues in this case was unfair and incompetent and that the investigation conclusions cannot be supported. He says the case papers are deficient in that no screen shots, prints or downloads are disclosed in the case papers and that the evidence of the Student C is in effect a "web of lies". He says it was Student C who made advances to him which were rejected.

Findings of Fact

Our findings of fact are as follows:

We have found the following particulars of the allegation against Robert Steadman proven, for these reasons:

- 1. Between January 2010 and May 2011 Robert Frederick Steadman engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Student, C, which included text messages, inappropriate physical contact and meetings outside of School.**

We have carefully considered the accounts given by Student C the principal witness in this case which are contained in written summaries of two interviews held with Student C by the Head Teacher of Lady Manners School, Witness A.

Student C has not been called to give evidence in this hearing even though she is now over 20. We were told that she has declined to be involved further. There is no statement from her in the case papers. We are also concerned that the interview summaries have not been signed or dated and we have no evidence that she has checked their accuracy or approved the records in any way. We also learned that she made a statement to the Police who investigated this matter but we do not have a copy of that statement.

Finally Witness C told the hearing that she interviewed Student C in the course of the Local Authority's investigation and although a record of that interview exists we have not seen a copy of it – it is not included in the case papers.

The only evidence from Student C is therefore hearsay and we have determined that the deficiencies in the interview records and the absence of other statements/accounts given by Student C require that we should treat her evidence with caution.

However we have concluded that we can rely upon it to the extent that we are satisfied that text messages were exchanged between Mr Steadman and Student C over a significant period of time and that a meeting took place in Mr Steadman's car on 14 May 2011.

Those conclusions are supported by admissions that Mr Steadman himself made in his Investigation Meeting interview with Witness A on 20 July 2011. In that interview which was sent to Mr Steadman and, subject to some comments, approved by him he agreed that he had sent text messages and Emails to Student C. He said that the majority had been about arranging lifts and baby sitting. She was also having problems with her

mother and she texted him about it. He said he thought he was being a supportive teacher. He continued – “It was a silly thing to do but at the time I thought it was the right thing to do”.

He mentioned an exchange when Student C was having an interview in London and she sent messages to say she was lonely and nervous. He said he replied with things like “be confident”. As she was bored she suggested playing eye spy or truth or dare. He commented “With hindsight I knew she shouldn’t have had my number but I was trying to calm her down”. He accepted there had possibly been a message about a dress she’d bought and how he had asked her to show it to him sometime which was “a follow on from other messages” and “sounds pervy out of context”.

He talked about Student C saying that she loved him and that his response was that “nothing can happen, I’m your teacher. We’re friends”.

We conclude on Mr Steadman’s own account of these exchanges that they form the basis of a relationship between teacher and pupil that was entirely inappropriate. In his written statement to this hearing Mr Steadman focuses on perceived differences in Student C’s various accounts of what transpired but does not acknowledge that the texts which he admits passed between himself and Student C were of themselves inappropriate because of the boundaries that should properly be observed in such a formal relationship.

This despite the fact that we heard from Witness A that Mr Steadman had attended Safeguarding and Child Protection Training delivered by the Headteacher on 12 February 2010. That training had included guidance on the duty of care to be exercised by teachers in dealings with pupils and the importance of demonstrating integrity, maturity and good judgement.

Specifically attendees were advised to keep all communications within clear professional boundaries not to give out personal contact details, only to make contact with children for professional reasons and that text messaging was rarely appropriate. Judged against those clear criteria we conclude that on his own account of the text messages they were plainly inappropriate.

Turning to the meeting on Saturday 14 May 2011 Mr Steadman says in his interview that Student C had been babysitting for him on the previous Tuesday evening. He arrived home and she “flirted and remained in a way he found uncomfortable. She put the kids to bed. I found her behaviour peculiar.” He describes later a series of messages and Student C said she loved him. He sent her a message saying that he hoped she had got it clear that nothing can happen.

Thereafter he accepted that he may have suggested a meeting with her. On the Saturday – unbeknown to Student C’s mother – he drove her to a car park at the end of the Monsail Trail because “I wanted somewhere private where we wouldn’t be overheard but

somewhere public to protect myself. This is where she said I wish I could do something to make you not my teacher. I gave her a friendly hug at the end. She tried to kiss me but I pulled away and said that wasn't going to help. There may have been contact. There was definitely no inappropriate touching."

Mr Steadman's own account of his strategy for dealing with this situation was in our view totally inappropriate and again discloses a fundamental lack of judgement. It cannot be acceptable for a teacher to arrange what was clearly a clandestine one to one meeting with one of his pupils in this way. In our view it makes no difference at all that by this date Student C was 18 as Mr Steadman being her teacher was still in a position of trust towards her. His lack of judgement is further exposed by his admission that he "gave her a friendly hug". We therefore find this particular proved.

2. Between 17 March 2011 and 21 March 2011 Robert Frederick Steadman allowed Student C to borrow his School laptop over the weekend and disclosed his laptop password to her.

In his written statement at page 518 Mr Steadman says "Yes I did lend Student C my laptop. And yes, I realise, in retrospect, this was a silly thing to do but it was done with the best intentions." He says he did it as she was very behind in her coursework and that at the time there were no sensitive documents on it, not, as far as he was aware, anything she shouldn't see". He did so as a caring teacher. He goes on to accept that he also disclosed his password to her but changed it as soon as he got the laptop back after the weekend.

These admissions reaffirm information that he provided in his investigation interview with Witness A on Wednesday 20 July 2011. Student C says that she discovered pornographic images on the Computer when she had access to it over the weekend. Pornographic images were later discovered on Mr Steadman's school laptop when, as a result of Student C's disclosures, it was examined by the Local Authority IT investigation team using a software programme called Encase.

We conclude therefore that it was Mr Steadman's school laptop which was lent to Student C over the weekend and was subsequently interrogated by the Local Authority. Witness C told us that it is identifiable by a serial number and her evidence left us in no doubt that the Local Authority examined and produced a report on the material discovered on the laptop which had been issued by the School to Mr Steadman.

At page 224 of the case papers is a certificate signed by Mr Steadman which acknowledges that he had read and understood the School's "Acceptable Use of IT" policy. That Policy is exhibited at pages 206-217. The Policy states at paragraph 3.3 "The laptop provided must not be used by any person(s) other than the authorised user to whom it has been allocated ..." At paragraph 6.7 it indicates that "All passwords are to be treated as sensitive, confidential information" and further advises that passwords should not be shared with others. We find this particular is proved.

3. During March 2011 inappropriate images were downloaded onto Mr Steadman's School laptop via software that had not been authorised for use on the laptop and these images were subsequently viewed by Student C.

Witness C gave evidence about the Local Authority's involvement in this investigation and the Use of IT Equipment Report at pages 180 – 194 of the case papers. She explained the methodology applied in examination of Mr Steadman's school laptop and preparation of the report. She explained the qualifications and expertise of her colleague Individual D who had carried out the technical examination of the machine using a software application called Encase.

We found Witness C to be a capable and credible witness. She dealt well with the many questions posed by the Panel. As a consequence we found no reason to doubt the principal findings of the report itself.

The report confirmed that inappropriate images had been discovered within a file on the DropBox application on the computer. Witness C had seen a sample of the images and described them as being sexually explicit with unclothed young women engaged in a variety of poses. The discovery of pornographic material supports the claim made by Student C that she had discovered similar images on the laptop over the weekend that she had borrowed the machine – information which had triggered the investigation of the laptop.

The report concluded that a synchronisation process took place between the school laptop and Mr Steadman's account on 7 March 2011 – we found no reason to question that conclusion which meant that the images were downloaded on that date. We were also told in the report that a number of "adult images" were found stored within folders that also contained Mr Steadman's personal photos.

The report leaves open the issue of whether the synchronisation process was undertaken intentionally or accidentally by Mr Steadman or by another individual to whom he had disclosed his access credentials and was using his laptop. However we are not required to determine that issue but would note that we find it very difficult to believe that Mr Steadman was unaware of the existence of the inappropriate material based on where it was found – namely in his personal files – and given his frequent regular use of the laptop.

This particular also alleges that the DropBox software had not been authorised for use on the laptop as required by the School's Acceptable Use of IT Policy at paragraph 3.4 which provides (page 208) – "No addition or deletion of any software or hardware is allowed without the express permission of ICT Support Personnel." In addition paragraph 5.5 (page 210) provides "Software must only be installed modified, uninstalled or deleted by members of the ICT Support Department."

In his written statement Mr Steadman describes having a long face to face discussion with the ICT Network Manager (Individual E) and the Senior ICT Technician (Individual F) when he was told it was fine otherwise he would not have installed it.

When interviewed by the Local Authority both Individual E and Individual F denied that any such authorisation was given to Mr Steadman. Individual E is recorded as saying that “There is no way I knew it was on there or that I would have approved it. It wouldn’t have been my staff who installed it and we wouldn’t have approved him to do it himself”. Individual F’s recorded response is “that’s not something we use and I’m not really aware what it does.” We do not believe that Mr Steadman had any authorisation and cannot accept that both ICT members interviewed are mistaken in their recollection or are lying. We therefore find this particular proved.

Findings as to Unacceptable Professional Conduct and/or Conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute

We find this is a case of Unacceptable Professional Conduct. The safeguarding of pupils is properly to be regarded as being of paramount importance and relies on members of the profession observing the boundaries that must attend the teacher/pupil relationship.

If public trust in the profession is to be maintained then teachers must maintain the highest possible standards of ethics and behaviour in accordance with Part 2 of the Teachers Standards guidance issued by the Department for Education. Those standards require teachers to “treat pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, and at all times observing proper boundaries appropriate to a teacher’s professional position AND “having regard to the need to safeguard pupils’ well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions”.

Mr Steadman was in a position of trust towards Student C and has demonstrably betrayed that trust by his conduct. He failed to observe the detailed safeguarding training given by the Headteacher in February 2010 and allowed an inappropriate relationship to develop with Student C.

In addition he has shown a disregard for the School’s important IT policies which resulted in Student C viewing pornographic images on the laptop that he provided for her. Whatever his motives in lending the laptop to her his failure to comply with the School’s procedures in relation to protecting the integrity of the IT equipment lead to an entirely undesirable outcome for the student. In our judgement this is a case of Unacceptable Professional Conduct.

Panel's recommendation to the Secretary of State

We recognise that Mr Steadman has a previous good record as a member of the profession and have carefully considered the testimonials provided for Mr Steadman by Individuals G,H and I at pages 473 and 474 of the case papers which speak highly of him.

However the evidence of his relationship with Student C and particularly the ongoing nature of the exchange of messages and Emails disclose a sustained course of conduct which we regard as especially serious.

The meeting on 14 May 2011 with Student C in his car – on Mr Steadman's own account – was deliberately planned and arranged so that he was alone with the student in a location where they were unlikely to be observed. In the course of that liaison they discussed very personal matters and Mr Steadman acknowledges that he gave Student C a hug. We consider that conduct to be very serious and we are concerned that in his response to this case Mr Steadman fails to recognise his inappropriate behaviour.

That Mr Steadman might still consider the circumstances of that meeting to be justified causes us very great anxiety. We think it discloses a fundamental lack of insight into his safeguarding responsibilities as a teacher – even though over two years has elapsed since the events under review.

The case has disclosed a serious departure from the standards that every teacher should observe and misconduct that certainly had the potential to affect the education and well being of Student C. In fact we heard from the Headteacher that Student C was about to sit her A level exams and that she did not do as well in those exams as had been expected. His impression was that “it had taken a real toll on her”.

In some of his responses in interview Mr Steadman makes mention of accepting, with the benefit of hindsight, that some of his actions were “silly” and that “at some point I've been foolish and naïve” (page 160 – his investigation interview with Witness A). It may be that he had a greater appreciation of the inappropriateness of his messaging with Student C at the time than he is willing to acknowledge. However his denial of the allegations in this case and his suggestion - as contained in his written statement to the Panel - that all the witnesses who gave evidence to the hearing have been dishonest suggests otherwise.

The disregard that he displayed for the school procedures governing the safe keeping of his school laptop further compound his serious failings and directly lead to Student C viewing pornographic material when, in fact, his duty was to protect his pupil from such an eventuality.

In the end Mr Steadman has fundamentally abused his position of trust towards Student C. We have asked ourselves whether we would be comfortable with a teacher who has misbehaved in the ways we have found established to be involved in teaching in the immediate future.

Our unanimous view is that we would not. Therefore we consider that our public duty requires us to recommend that a Prohibition Order be imposed in this case. We believe a Prohibition Order should be imposed for the protection of pupils, and both to maintain public confidence in the profession and to uphold proper standards of conduct. Given our concerns about Mr Steadman's apparent lack of insight we propose that he may be allowed to apply for the Prohibition Order to be set aside once a period of 5 years has elapsed. At that time the issue of his insight and understanding may be further considered.

Decision and reasons on behalf of the Secretary of State

I have carefully considered the findings and recommendations of the panel.

The panel have found all the allegations proven and have judged that they amount to Unacceptable Professional Conduct. Mr Steadman engaged in a sustained period of behaviour that abused the position of trust that should be maintained in a teacher/pupil relationship.

Mr Steadman's behaviour is a serious departure from the standards expected of a teacher and had the potential to affect the education and well being of the student. Additionally Mr Steadman has shown very little insight into his behaviour.

In all the circumstances I agree that a Prohibition Order is an appropriate sanction in the public interest. A minimum review period of 5 years is proportionate and would allow Mr Steadman sufficient time to reflect on his behaviour and show appropriate insight.

This means that Mr Robert Frederick Steadman is prohibited from teaching indefinitely and cannot teach in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children's home in England. He may apply for the Prohibition Order to be set aside, **but not until 7 October 2018, 5 years from the date of this order at the earliest**. If he does apply, a panel will meet to consider whether the Prohibition Order should be set aside. Without a successful application, Mr Robert Frederick Steadman remains barred from teaching indefinitely.

This Order takes effect from the date on which it is served on the Teacher.

Mr Robert Frederick Steadman 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.

NAME OF DECISION MAKER: Paul Heathcote

Date: 27 September 2013

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