



Teaching
Regulation
Agency

Mr Christopher Wakeford: Professional conduct panel outcome

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

June 2022

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

Teacher: Mr Christopher Wakeford
TRA reference: 0019452
Date of determination: 29 June 2022
Former employer: Sedbergh School, Sedbergh

Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened on 27 to 29 June 2022 virtually via Microsoft Teams to consider the case of Mr Christopher Wakeford.

The panel members were Mr Paul Millett (lay panellist – in the chair), Ms Jane Gotschel (teacher panellist) and Dr Angela Brown (lay panellist).

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

The presenting officer for the TRA was Ms Kiera Riddy of Browne Jacobson LLP solicitors.

Mr Christopher Wakeford was present and was represented by Mr Jonathan Storey, Counsel.

The hearing took place in public and was recorded.

Allegations

It is alleged that Mr Christopher Wakeford was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, in that whilst employed at Sedbergh School:

1. During the period December 2018 to December 2019 he failed to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A and/or exchanged messages on his personal mobile phoned with Pupil A including:

- a. Late at night, at the weekend and/or during school holidays;
- b. Discussing his personal life including potential relationships and/or his relationship status;
- c. Asking for advice on how to talk to a female;
- d. Referring to Pupil A as his 'wingwoman' and/or referring to himself as Pupil A's 'wingman'
- e. Using inappropriate language such as:
 - i. 'fucked' and
 - ii. 'shitfaced'
- f. Discussing other pupils at the school including:
 - i. Disclosing details of the reason a pupil was suspended;
 - ii. Referring to a pupil who had made a complaint about him as a 'shit stirrer'
- g. Received one or more pictures and/or videos of Pupil A including on one occasion her being in a sports crop top
- h. Sent one or more images of himself to Pupil A.
 - i. Organising and/or meeting Pupil A for a coffee on one or more occasions

2. As a result of the conversations had at allegation 1 above, he failed to:

- a. disclose information to the School about Pupil A's personal life including her father trying to harm himself and being hospitalized;
- b. report that pupils were drinking on a Saturday night by themselves;
- c. inform the School that Pupil A had viewed another member of staff's emails

3. His behaviour as may be found proven at 1 above demonstrated a lack of insight into previous advice/warnings he had been given and/or failure to comply with previous warnings issued by the School;

- a. in or around July 2017;
- b. in or around October 2017;
- c. in or around November 2018, which concerned Pupil A.

In a statement of agreed facts dated 27 March 2022, Mr Wakeford admitted all allegations except for particular 1.f.i. On the morning of the hearing, Mr Wakeford also admitted the facts of particular 1.f.i.

In respect of those allegations admitted by Mr Wakeford, it was accepted that this amounted to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Preliminary applications

In advance of Individual A giving evidence, Mr Storey requested the panel to agree to parts of her evidence, relating to personal matters concerning [redacted], to be heard in private. There was no objection from Ms Riddy and the panel concluded that it was in the interests of justice for such evidence to be given in private.

In relation to allegation 1g., it was suggested on behalf of Mr Wakeford that a more accurate description of the garment being worn by Pupil A in the screenshot was a sports crop top as opposed to a sports bra which suggested that Pupil A was wearing an item of underwear. The panel accepted the evidence of Individual B who stated that it could be described as a sports bra or a sports crop top and that, whilst not permitted at the school except under a shirt, she had seen such tops worn by women in gyms or outside. Individual A had also described it as a sports crop top. Such evidence had not been challenged.

Having considered the screenshot on which the TRA relied in support of this allegation, together with the evidence of Individual B and Individual A, the panel considered that it would be appropriate to amend the allegation so that it read, "Received one or more pictures and/or videos of Pupil A including on one occasion her being in a sports crop top."

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 5.

Section 2: Notice of proceedings and response – pages 7 to 27.

Section 3: Statement of Agreed Facts – pages 29 to 35;

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency witness statements pages 38 to 64;

Section 5: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 67 to 424;

Section 6: Teacher documents – pages 426 to 499.

The panel members confirmed that they had read all of the documents within the bundle, in advance of the hearing and the additional document that the panel decided to admit.

Witnesses

The panel heard oral evidence from the following witnesses called by the TRA:

Individual B – [redacted]

Individual C – [redacted]

Mr Wakeford gave evidence on his own account and Individual A was called to give evidence in his support.

Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

The panel carefully considered the case before it and reached a decision.

Mr Wakeford had been employed at Sedbergh School ("the school") from January 2016 on a six-month contract. He went on to qualify as a teacher in the summer of 2017 and took on a full-time role as a history teacher, head of athletics, and a resident tutor at one of the boarding houses at the school.

As a result of concerns raised with regard to Mr Wakeford's conduct, an investigation was commenced but, before the disciplinary process was finalised, in December 2019, Mr Wakeford 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:

1. During the period December 2018 to December 2019 you failed to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A and/or exchanged messages on your personal mobile phoned with Pupil A including:

Before considering each particular, the Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"Allegation 1

2. Mr Wakeford admits that whilst employed as a Teacher at the Sedbergh School he failed to maintain professional boundaries with Pupil A during the period December 2018 to December 2019.

3. Mr Wakeford accepts that in providing Pupil A with his personal mobile number it facilitated personal communication between him and Pupil A outside of School.

4. Mr Wakeford admits that he failed to maintain professional boundaries with Pupil A by communicating with her by the use of his personal mobile phone and text message."

a. Late at night, at the weekend and/or during school holidays;

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"5. Mr Wakeford admits that he failed to maintain professional boundaries with Pupil A by communicating with her by the use of his personal mobile phone and text message. Mr Wakeford accepts that he exchanged messages with Pupil A late at night, at the weekend and/or during school holidays.

6. Mr Wakeford accepts that messages were exchanged on Christmas Day 2018 and continued over the festive period. Mr Wakeford further accepts that messages were exchanged throughout August during the School summer holidays and during the evening, some at 23.57 and others after 01.00."

Mr Wakeford's admission was consistent with evidence before the panel. The panel had read screenshots of messages sent by Mr Wakeford to Pupil A between the hours of 12 midnight and 2 a.m., together with messages sent on 25 and 28 December 2018.

The panel found the facts of this particular proved.

b. Discussing your personal life including potential relationships and/or your relationship status;

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"7. Mr Wakeford admits that he failed to maintain professional boundaries with Pupil A by communicating with her by the use of his personal mobile phone and text message.

8. Mr Wakeford accepts that in permitting personal contact with Pupil A text messages were exchanged, including messages in which he discussed his personal life including potential relationships and/or his relationship status. Mr Wakeford admits that these messages were inappropriate."

The panel had read the messages sent by Mr Wakeford to Pupil A and his admission was consistent with the content of those messages. He refers to his relationship status and, by way of example, having sent Pupil A a photograph of a woman, there is the following exchange:

Pupil A *"So you know how you have to get the athlete approval for who you date you don't have it"*

Mr Wakeford *"Haha so you don't give approval?"*

Pupil A *"Nope neither does [pupil's name] or [pupil's name]"*

In another exchange, Mr Wakeford and Pupil A discuss staying single, and then exchange the following messages:

Pupil A *"I mean I'm obviously not going to stay single my whole life I'm going to have an ace wedding"*

Mr Wakeford *"Haha well for the record I'm not planning on being single forever either; gonna have one massive piss-up of a wedding"*

The panel found the facts of this particular proved.

c. Asking for advice on how to talk to a female;

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"9. Mr Wakeford admits that he failed to maintain professional boundaries with Pupil A by communicating with her by the use of his personal mobile phone and text message and asked for advice on how to talk to a female. Mr Wakeford accepts that these messages were inappropriate."

This is consistent with the messages read by the panel which had been sent by Mr Wakeford to Pupil A when he was in a bar on a beach.

The panel found the facts of this particular proved.

d. Referring to Pupil A as your 'wingwoman' and/or referring to yourself as Pupil A's 'wingman'

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"10. Mr Wakeford admits that he failed to maintain professional boundaries with Pupil A by communicating with her by the use of his personal mobile phone and text message.

11. Mr Wakeford admits that he referred to Pupil A as his 'wingwoman' and referred to himself as Pupil A's 'wingman'."

The panel had read messages within the bundle in which Mr Wakeford refers to Pupil A as his "wingwoman" and himself as Pupil A's "wingman". The panel noted that the messages in which the description appears relate to circumstances in which Mr Wakeford and Pupil A would provide advice and mutual support to each other.

The panel was satisfied that his admission was consistent with the evidence contained in the messages Mr Wakeford and Pupil A sent to each other.

The panel found the facts of this particular proved.

e. Using inappropriate language such as:

Before considering each particular, the Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"12. Mr Wakeford admits that he failed to maintain professional boundaries with Pupil A by communicating with her by the use of his personal mobile phone and text message and using inappropriate language."

The panel had read the messages sent by Mr Wakeford to Pupil A. The panel was satisfied that certain messages that he sent contained inappropriate language such as, "shit" and "bullshit".

i. 'fucked' and

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"13. Mr Wakeford admits that he failed to maintain professional boundaries with Pupil A by communicating with her by the use of his personal mobile phone and text message and using inappropriate language including the language 'fucked'."

The panel had read the message in which this word appears and was therefore satisfied that Mr Wakeford's admission was consistent with the evidence and found that he had used the word alleged.

The panel found the facts of this particular proved.

ii. 'shitfaced'

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"14. Mr Wakeford admits that he failed to maintain professional boundaries with Pupil A by communicating with her by the use of his personal mobile phone and text message and using inappropriate language including the language 'shitfaced'."

The panel had read the message in which this word appears and was therefore satisfied that Mr Wakeford's admission was consistent with the evidence and found that he had used the word alleged.

Indeed, the panel noted that the exchange in which this word appeared related to circumstances in which Pupil A stated, "...*Hart house ball o was on a ban so my game was to see how many people I could get to chun on my table and I think I got like 7/10 or something.*"

Mr Wakeford replied "*Don't you ruin our squad!*"

Pupil A "*I'm not How would I*"

Mr Wakeford "*By getting them all shitfaced*" with a laughing emoji.

The panel found the facts of this particular proved.

f. Discussing other pupils at the school including:

Before considering each particular, the Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"15. Mr Wakeford admits that he failed to maintain professional boundaries with Pupil A by communicating with her by the use of his personal mobile phone and text message. He further admits to discussing other pupils at the School."

i. Disclosing details of the reason a pupil was suspended;

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"16. Mr Wakeford denies that he disclosed to Pupil A the details of the reason a pupil was suspended from the School.

17. Mr Wakeford admits to sending a text message to Pupil A on Thursday 11 July 2019 saying "I had nothing to do with his suspension; he was caught with drink on battlefields".

18. Mr Wakeford admits to sending a further text message to Pupil A on Thursday 11 July 2019 saying "...One of the other boys was found drunk, so room searches were done to find the drink. It was the Sedgwicks boys drinking and the drink had come from [Pupil B]. Simple. I had nothing to do with it other than being a staff member searching rooms for drink"."

At the commencement of the hearing, it was confirmed that Mr Wakeford admitted the facts of this particular. It was initially denied on the basis that Mr Wakeford believed the reason for the pupil's suspension was public knowledge. However, there was no evidence to suggest that, prior to his disclosure of the reason, Pupil A was aware of the circumstances. Even if she was so aware, it did not detract from the fact that, as a teacher, he had discussed with, and told, another pupil, namely Pupil A, the reasons for a pupil's suspension.

The panel was therefore satisfied that Mr Wakeford's admission was consistent with the evidence and found the facts of this particular proved.

ii. Referring to a pupil who had made a complaint about you as a 'shit stirrer'

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"19. Mr Wakeford admits that he failed to maintain professional boundaries with Pupil A by communicating with her by the use of his personal mobile phone and text message and discussing other pupils at the School.

20. Mr Wakeford accepts that he referred to a pupil who had made a complaint about him as a '*shit stirrer*'."

The panel had read the messages in the course of which this description of another pupil is used. The panel was satisfied that the admission was consistent with the evidence.

The panel found the facts of this particular proved.

g. Received one or more pictures and/or videos of Pupil A including on one occasion her being in a sports crop top

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"21. Mr Wakeford admits that he failed to maintain professional boundaries with Pupil A by communicating with her by the use of his personal mobile phone and text message.

22. Mr Wakeford admits to having received one or more pictures and/or videos of Pupil A including on one occasion her being in a sports bra."

The panel had considered a number of exchanges of messages between Mr Wakeford and Pupil A in which photographs of Pupil A were included.

Whilst the panel had not viewed the video as it was not available, it had observed a screen shot of the video in which Pupil A is present when she was wearing a sports crop top as alleged.

The panel was therefore satisfied that Mr Wakeford's admission was consistent with the evidence and found the facts of this particular proved.

h. Sent one or more images of yourself to Pupil A.

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"23. Mr Wakeford admits that he failed to maintain professional boundaries with Pupil A by communicating with her by the use of his personal mobile phone and text message.

24. Mr Wakeford admits to having sent one or more images of himself to Pupil A."

The panel had considered a number of exchanges of messages between Mr Wakeford and Pupil A in which photographs of Mr Wakeford were included.

The panel was therefore satisfied that Mr Wakeford's admission was consistent with the evidence and found the facts of the particular proved.

i. Organising and/or meeting Pupil A for a coffee on one or more occasions

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"25. Mr Wakeford admits that he failed to maintain professional boundaries with Pupil A by communicating with her by the use of his personal mobile phone and text message and by organising and/or meeting Pupil A for a coffee on one or more occasions.

26. Mr Wakeford admits that he met Pupil A at Queens Hall for a coffee on 11 November 2019 and met again for coffee on 27 November 2019."

The panel had listened to the evidence of Mr Wakeford in which he confirmed that he had met with Pupil A on the two occasions specified in the Statement of Agreed Facts, one occasion on the school site and one occasion when they met in a café just outside the school. Both meetings took place after instructions had been given to Mr Wakeford not to meet with Pupil A on a one-to-one basis.

The panel was therefore satisfied that Mr Wakeford's admission was consistent with the evidence and found the facts of the particulars proved.

Having found the facts of particulars 1a. to 1i. proved, the panel was satisfied that, between December 2018 and December 2019, Mr Wakeford exchanged messages with Pupil A on his personal mobile phone. The panel was also satisfied that the content and language of the messages, taken together as a whole, demonstrated a serious failure on the part of Mr Wakeford to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A.

Consequently, the panel found allegation 1 proved.

2. As a result of the conversations had at allegation 1 above, you failed to:

a. disclose information to the School about Pupil A's personal life including her father trying to harm himself and being hospitalized;

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"27. Mr Wakeford admits that as a result of conversations which took place between himself and Pupil A he failed to disclose information to the School about Pupil A's personal life including her father trying to harm himself and being hospitalised."

Mr Wakeford confirmed that he had not disclosed to Individual B as [redacted], or any other member of staff, the information that he had received about [redacted]. Whilst he now accepts that he was wrong, he considered at the time that he was better placed to deal with the matter and he had been asked by Individual A not to disclose the information to the school.

The panel was satisfied that the relationship he had allowed to develop with Pupil A, as illustrated by the conversations particularised in allegation 1, leading to a failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, had led to a failure to disclose important safeguarding information to [redacted] or other senior member of staff at the school.

The panel accepted the evidence of Individual B and found that, although Individual A had requested the information be kept confidential, it did not affect Mr Wakeford's overriding safeguarding duty to disclose the information to [redacted]. Further, Individual A's evidence was that she had advised Pupil A's house mistress and the school counsellor of Pupil A's family circumstances. However, the panel found that Individual A's advice to the school did not excuse Mr Wakeford from his responsibility to notify [redacted] of this matter.

The panel therefore found the facts of this particular proved.

b. report that pupils were drinking on a Saturday night by themselves;

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"28. Mr Wakeford admits that as a result of conversations which took place between himself and Pupil A he failed to report that pupils were drinking on a Saturday night by themselves."

The panel had read the exchange of messages between Mr Wakeford and Pupil A in relation to this allegation. He was told by Pupil A that pupils were drinking alcohol when

they were not allowed to and at a time when Pupil A had told Mr Wakeford that a member of staff was not present.

Mr Wakeford says, "Guessing they didn't get caught?" Pupil A replies, "Corse not" and Mr Wakeford says, "Lol. Well played then". There is then an exchange relating to the whereabouts of certain members of staff when the drinking was taking place.

The panel was therefore satisfied that Mr Wakeford's admission was consistent with the evidence and the panel found the facts of the particular proved.

c. inform the School that Pupil A had viewed another member of staff's emails

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"29. Mr Wakeford admits that as a result of conversations which took place between himself and Pupil A he failed to inform the School that Pupil A had viewed another member of staff's emails."

In messages from Pupil A to Mr Wakeford, it was made clear that Pupil A had read emails sent by her House Mistress about Pupil A. Mr Wakeford did not report the matter. In his oral evidence, Mr Wakeford stated that he had a sharp word with Pupil A regarding her conduct. However, his messages at the time made light of Pupil A's conduct. For example, he sent messages to Pupil A as follows:

"Where have you been snooping"

"That's not accidental but that's dangerous"

"Well hope you didn't come across anything too shocking" and

"Says the girl who just hacked the school email"

The panel was therefore satisfied that Mr Wakeford's admission was consistent with the evidence and found the facts of this particular proved.

The panel therefore found allegation 2 proved.

3. Your behaviour as may be found proven at 1 above demonstrated a lack of insight into previous advice/warnings you had been given and/or failure to comply with previous warnings issued by the School;

a. in or around July 2017;

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"30. Mr Wakeford admits that his conduct in allegation 1 showed a lack of insight into previous advice/warnings he had received and a failure to comply with previous warnings issued by the School in or around July 2017."

Following an event at the school, the panel found that Mr Wakeford was provided with the following warning from [redacted], Individual C, with regard to his future conduct:

"Individual C then had a separate meeting 3 days later and stressed to CW the following things:

- He had put himself in a dangerous position with a pupil
- He must watch how much alcohol he drinks when in the presence of pupils and parents
- He must understand the perceptions are very dangerous
- We talked about athletics training and how he must never train pupils 1:1 and must not communicate with them directly via text/WhatsApp etc
- Individual C would follow this up with CW at the start of term"

The panel found that the subsequent conduct on the part of Mr Wakeford illustrated a lack of insight and a failure to comply fully with this warning.

On this basis, the panel found the facts of this particular proved.

b. in or around October 2017;

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"31. Mr Wakeford admits that his conduct in allegation 1 showed a lack of insight into previous advice/warnings he had received and a failure to comply with previous warnings issued by the School in or around October 2017."

The panel considered an extract from an email from Individual D to the Headteacher, Individual C, on 11 October 2017 that outlined the content of a meeting Individual D had held with Mr Wakeford and the instructions provided to him. Individual D stated to Individual C that:

"...the School has moved on from the incident last term...he must do the same; but perception change is really tricky in such a small place - there needs to be a massive push by CW on this..."

In his reply, Individual C says:

*"Brilliant
Thank you
Lets hope he now listens!"*

The panel found that the subsequent conduct on the part of Mr Wakeford illustrated a lack of insight and a failure to comply fully with this warning.

On this basis, the panel found the facts of this particular proved.

c. in or around November 2018, which concerned Pupil A.

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

"32. Mr Wakeford admits that his conduct in allegation 1 showed a lack of insight into previous advice/warnings he had received and a failure to comply with previous warnings issued by the School in or around November 2018, which concerned Pupil A.

33. Mr Wakeford admits receiving advice/warning from the School's [redacted] who advised: *"if Pupil A contacts you to see her, please may you respond and agree to meet her in Lupton House; please blind copy Individual E in to your replies. Please only use email for communication"*. [redacted] went on to state *"all conversations need to be documented in an email to Individual E"*. Mr Wakeford responded to this email implying his understanding."

The panel had read the email from Individual B to Mr Wakeford dated 18 November 2018 and considered the instructions set out in that email to be perfectly clear. Furthermore, the required behaviour from Mr Wakeford was not a request. In the email, the list of instructions is prefaced by the following:

"To that end, please may I insist on the following:

If [Pupil A] contacts you to see her, please may you respond and agree to meet her in Lupton House; please blind copy Individual E in to your replies. Please only use email for communication so Individual E can record how often she is requesting this.

This contact should be in Individual E 's private side/office and therefore Individual E can: join the conversation at anytime and ideally you should steer the conversation to get Individual E in - that way, the transfer of [Pupil A]'s trust can move too.

All conversations need to be documented in an email to Individual E with your responses too. Bullet points/notes are fine.

In due course, we would hope that Individual E would be the person that [Pupil A] identifies as the person she wishes to talk to.

Please may all communication with parents come from Individual E - this is essential as this is a potentially volatile situation and we need to ensure our records and discussions are centralised. Please don't directly contact parents yourself with anything - Individual E will do this. If mum (or dad) contacts you via any medium, please could you forward this directly to Individual F. There are other complexities here which need to be carefully managed."

In a response to Individual B on the same day, Mr Wakeford stated: *"Thank you for your email, which all makes sense and is understandable"*.

The panel found that the subsequent conduct on the part of Mr Wakeford illustrated a lack of insight and a failure to comply fully with this warning.

On this basis, the panel found the facts of this particular proved.

The warnings provided to Mr Wakeford in July and October 2017 were general and contained instructions and guidance on his overall future conduct. The instructions from Individual B in November 2018 related specifically to Pupil A. Despite the instructions and warnings, Mr Wakeford went on to engage in the level of contact with Pupil A as illustrated in allegation 1 above. Such conduct illustrated a lack of insight and a total

failure to comply with previous warnings and instructions concerning Pupil A from senior members of staff at the school to include [redacted].

On this basis, the panel found allegation 3 proved.

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

The Statement of Agreed Facts states as follows:

34. Mr Wakeford admits the facts of the allegations against him and that they amount to Unacceptable Professional Conduct / conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute as set out in rules 2.5 of the Disciplinary Procedures for the regulation of the teaching profession which may be defined as misconduct of a serious nature, falling significantly short of the standard of behaviour expected of a teacher / behaviour which is directly related to an individual's suitability to be a teacher and which, if proven, may bring the profession into disrepute, in accordance with the guidance set out in the Department of Education advice document 'The Prohibition of Teachers'.

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".

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Wakeford, in relation to the facts found proved in respect of allegations 1, 2 and 3, involved breaches of the Teachers' Standards. The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Mr Wakeford 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
 - 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 an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Wakeford amounted to misconduct of a serious nature which fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

Therefore, in its judgement, the panel found that Mr Wakeford's conduct as set out in the allegations amounted to unacceptable professional conduct.

Mr Wakeford had received a number of clear warnings and instructions from senior members of the school over a period of two years, two warnings being of a general nature and one relating specifically to his future conduct relating to Pupil A. Despite such warnings, Mr Wakeford had ignored such instructions and had allowed a relationship to develop with a potentially vulnerable person which was wholly inappropriate, although it was important to make clear that it was not suggested that the relationship was of an intimate or sexual nature.

The panel took into account 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 that they behave.

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

Having found the facts of allegations 1, 2 and 3 proved, the panel further found that Mr Wakeford's conduct 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 and of 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 a 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; the panel also considered the interest of retaining Mr Wakeford in the profession.

In the light of the panel's findings against Mr Wakeford, which involved a serious failure to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with a vulnerable pupil and repeated failures to abide by clear instructions and warnings from senior members of staff, the panel found that, in this case, all three public interest considerations are engaged.

There was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the protection of pupils, given the serious findings of an inappropriate and overly-familiar relationship with Pupil A,

although it had not been alleged, nor had the panel found, that the relationship with Pupil A was of an intimate or sexual nature.

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

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

The panel decided that there was also a strong public interest consideration in retaining the teacher in the profession, since no doubt had been cast upon his abilities as an educator and there was strong support for the view that Mr Wakeford is able to make a valuable contribution to the profession.

In view of 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 Wakeford.

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 Wakeford. 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, those that were relevant in this case were:

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers' Standards;
- abuse of position or trust (particularly involving vulnerable pupils);

In terms of aggravating features, the panel considers the following to be present in this case:

- Whilst it was not alleged that the relationship between Mr Wakeford and Pupil A was either intimate or sexual, it was entirely inappropriate, and was facilitated via social media on Mr Wakeford's personal mobile phone;
- The conduct had been perpetuated by Mr Wakeford for well over a year;
- It was perpetuated by Mr Wakeford despite having been given three separate warnings as to his behaviour, the first two warnings, in July and October 2017 respectively, being of a general nature and the third instruction and warning in November 2018 relating specifically to Pupil A;
- In relation to the warning and instruction in November 2018, Mr Wakeford confirmed that he understood the nature of the instruction with which [redacted], Individual B, insisted that he comply;
- The inappropriate conduct to which allegation 1 above involving Pupil A commenced within one month of that warning and instruction being issued;
- He failed to act on evidence that indicated children's welfare may have been at risk and failed to notify the designated safeguarding lead when he was under an obligation to do so.

Even though some of 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.

However, in the light of its findings, and in respect of the first two factors identified in the Advice, the panel found that Mr Wakeford's actions were deliberate and he was not acting under duress.

Notwithstanding that, it was clear that, although Mr Wakeford had only qualified in 2017, he did have a previously good record. He had also admitted all allegations made against him. Indeed, he had been open and transparent from the outset when the school commenced its investigation and he had continued to be so throughout these proceedings.

Having listened to Mr Wakeford give evidence, the panel was satisfied that the insight he had shown into his failings and his remorse for the consequences of his behaviour were genuine. He accepted that, despite his inexperience, and despite the level of expertise and experience available at the school, he had thought that he, "*knew best*". Indeed, it was said on his behalf that his conduct reflected, "*exuberant youthful arrogance*". It was also accepted that, at the time of his conduct leading to these proceedings, his level of insight was, "*not strong*".

However, having listened carefully to Mr Wakeford giving evidence, the panel was satisfied that the consequences of his actions had brought home to him the seriousness of his failures and that he now realised that, at the time, he certainly did not know best.

The panel had accepted the evidence of Individual A and found that she was fully aware, and supportive, of the nature of the relationship between Mr Wakeford and Pupil A. Indeed, Individual A confirmed the level of support that Mr Wakeford had provided to not only Pupil A but also herself.

Mr Wakeford had apologised to the panel and to the school for his behaviour, and at no stage did he attempt to shift responsibility for what had taken place. However, the panel noted that the roles taken on by Mr Wakeford at the school, as history teacher, head of athletics and resident tutor led to a commitment of time which was unsustainable.

However, there was considerable evidence to support the conclusion that, during his short teaching career, Mr Wakeford had shown very considerable commitment and talent as a teacher.

In the course of his time at the school, he had clearly made a very strong impression on those with whom he worked. The panel had read the documents within the bundle relating to the appraisals of Mr Wakeford carried out within the school, all of which contained positive remarks with regard to Mr Wakeford's talent as a teacher and his contribution in relation to pastoral care.

The panel listened to the evidence of [redacted] who attended the hearing to give evidence on behalf of the TRA. In answer to questions from Mr Storey, Individual C made the following remarks:

"Individual A felt supported by Mr Wakeford and also felt he supported Pupil A."

"Mr Wakeford as a sports coach was inspirational, hard-working, extremely talented and doing a very very good job."

As a history teacher, Individual C said that Mr Wakeford had worked hard to absorb a huge breadth of knowledge and, *"worked very very hard involving late nights. It was impressive, and he was making himself into a very good teacher."*

Sedbergh is a boarding school and, when commenting on Mr Wakeford's pastoral role, Individual C said that, *"his contribution was immense, huge"*. Individual C stated that Mr Wakeford was, *"A high contributor to all three areas, the class, on the sportsfield and the house."*

Finally, Individual C confirmed that Mr Wakefield, *"absolutely has things to offer the teaching profession in the future as long as lessons have been learned."*

It was suggested by Ms Riddy that limited weight should be placed on the written references Mr Wakeford had provided as it was not possible to challenge what had been said and also it was not clear whether those who had provided a testimonial were fully aware of the nature of the allegations being made.

However, the panel found that the seven written references from parents and teachers are consistent with the evidence provided by Individual C.

Indeed, [redacted], Individual D, had provided a reference and he confirms that he was fully aware of the allegations being made.

The following extract is taken from Individual D's reference:

"At no point during the investigation did Christopher deny the events described and he was, in my view, fully cooperative. He became acutely aware that his behaviour and actions fell short of the expected standards of the School and those demanded by the profession."

Christopher was a hard-working, dedicated Teacher and Coach. He immersed himself into the culture of the School and saw the benefits of the holistic nature of the boarding environment. Pupils and colleagues benefited from his warm, friendly and supportive approach and he often went well above and beyond in both his teaching and training to ensure pupils continued to develop at pace in both the classroom and on the athletics track.

Pupils spoke regularly of his classes with enthusiasm and he was respected by pupils and colleagues for his professional approach to his lessons and coaching sessions.

His naivety and actions of past behaviour as presented in the allegations cannot be condoned and have put at risk his continued membership of a profession he is clearly passionate about. I have no doubt that Christopher will have reflected extensively and reached a similar conclusion."

When Mr Wakefield left Sedbergh School, he subsequently took on a teaching role at [redacted]. Again, the school was made fully aware of the allegations Mr Wakeford faced but nonetheless, in January 2021, [redacted] provided a very supportive testimonial, confirming that he had made an excellent impression, concluding as follows:

"In summary, in the short time I have known Christopher, I have found him to have all the attributes that [redacted] looks for in a young and developing teacher. I can only see him becoming an outstanding teacher and an asset to our school in the future."

Finally, when Mr Wakeford started his role at Sedburgh School, he was assigned as personal tutor to a young pupil who [redacted]. The parents of that pupil had provided a testimonial which was highly supportive. The following are extracts from that testimonial:

"[redacted]. However, Chris introduced [Pupil] to the world of athletics and he has not looked back since.

[redacted]"

"Without Chris' efforts we doubt [Pupil] would be where he is today."

"Chris has the ability to get the most out of people and to help them realise their potential. We will forever be grateful to Chris and all he did for [Pupil]."

Finally, the panel had taken into consideration the written and oral evidence of Mr Wakeford.

The panel was satisfied that Mr Wakeford had given his evidence in a forthright and honest manner. The panel accepted his evidence when he confirmed that he fully recognised the failures on his part and that he had full insight in respect of those failures.

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 Wakeford's professional reputation has already been blemished as a result of his conduct. In the particular circumstances of this case, the public findings of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute is a sanction in itself and will be with Mr Wakeford throughout his career as a teacher.

Whilst not for a moment minimising the seriousness of Mr Wakeford's conduct, the panel has taken all of the circumstances into account, to include: the fact that his behaviour, however misconceived and, as he admitted, arrogant, was well-intentioned; his level of insight and remorse; the fact that, fortunately, his conduct had not led to actual harm; that the conduct giving rise to these proceedings dates back to the period prior to December 2019, and, finally, his potential as a person who can make a significant contribution to the teaching profession.

When assessing the risk of repetition of such behaviour, in the panel's assessment, such a risk is now negligible. To adopt the words of Individual C, the panel has concluded that Mr Wakeford has learned his lesson.

The panel was of the view that, applying the standard of the ordinary intelligent citizen, the recommendation of no prohibition order would be both a proportionate and an appropriate response. Given that the nature and severity of the behaviour were at the less serious end of the possible spectrum and, having considered the mitigating factors that were present, the panel determined that a recommendation for a prohibition order would not be appropriate in this case. The panel considered that the publication of the

adverse findings it had made was sufficient to send an appropriate message to Mr Wakeford as to the standards of behaviour that are not acceptable, and the publication would meet the public interest requirement of declaring proper standards of 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 sanction.

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 all of 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 recommended that the findings of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct likely to bring the profession into disrepute, should be published and that such an action is proportionate and in the public interest.

In particular, the panel has found that Mr Wakeford 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
 - 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 an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

The panel was, "satisfied that the conduct of Mr Wakeford amounted to misconduct of a serious nature which fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession."

Therefore, in its judgement, the panel, "found that Mr Wakeford's conduct as set out in the allegations amounted to unacceptable professional conduct."

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 Wakeford, and the impact that will have on the teacher, is proportionate and in the public interest.

In this case, I have considered the extent to which a prohibition order would protect children and safeguard pupils. The panel has observed, "Mr Wakeford had ignored such instructions and had allowed a relationship to develop with a potentially vulnerable person which was wholly inappropriate, although it was important to make clear that it was not suggested that the relationship was of an intimate or sexual nature."

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, "The panel accepted his evidence when he confirmed that he fully recognised the failures on his part and that he had full insight in respect of those failures." I have therefore given this element considerable weight in reaching my overall 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 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 that they behave."

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 Wakeford himself. The panel comment "Mr Wakeford's professional reputation has already been blemished as a result of his conduct. In the particular circumstances of this case, the public findings of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute is a sanction in itself and will be with Mr Wakeford throughout his career as a teacher."

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Wakeford from teaching and would also clearly deprive the public of his contribution to the profession for the period that it is in force.

For these reasons, I have concluded that a prohibition order is not proportionate or in the public interest. I consider that the publication of the findings made would be sufficient to send an appropriate message to the teacher as to the standards of behaviour that were not acceptable and that the publication would meet the public interest requirement of declaring proper standards of the profession.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Meyrick', followed by a vertical line.

Decision maker: Alan Meyrick

Date: 30 June 2022

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