



Teaching  
Regulation  
Agency

# **Mr Christopher North: Professional conduct panel meeting outcome**

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

**October 2023**

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

**Teacher:** Mr Christopher North

**Teacher ref number:** 0667563

**Teacher date of birth:** 19 October 1983

**TRA reference:** 0020687

**Date of determination:** 10 October 2023

**Former employer:** The Hall School, London

### **Introduction**

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened virtually on 10 October 2023, to consider the case of Mr Christopher North.

The panel members were Mr Duncan Tilley (lay panellist – in the chair), Ms Julia Hyde (teacher panellist) and Ms Sue Davies (lay panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Ms Claire Watson of Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP solicitors.

In advance of the meeting, after taking into consideration the public interest and the interests of justice, the TRA agreed to a request from Mr North that the allegations be considered without a hearing. Mr North provided a signed statement of agreed facts and admitted conviction of a relevant offence. The panel considered the case at a meeting without the attendance of the presenting officer Ms Louise Murphy-King or Mr North.

The meeting took place in private.

## **Allegations**

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of meeting dated 14 September 2023.

It was alleged that Mr Christopher North was guilty of having been convicted of a relevant offence, in that:

1. On or around 31 May 2022, he was convicted of:
  - a. three counts of making an indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of a child
  - b. Possessing a controlled drug (Class A – Cocaine)

Mr North admitted the facts of the allegations and conviction of a relevant offence.

## **Preliminary applications**

There were no preliminary applications.

## **Summary of evidence**

### **Documents**

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

Section 1: Chronology, anonymised pupil list and list of key people – pages 3 to 4

Section 2: Notice of referral, response and notice of meeting – pages 5 to 12

Section 3: Statement of agreed facts – pages 13 to 17

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 18 to 96

Section 5: Teacher documents – page 97

The panel members confirmed that they had read all of the documents within the bundle, in advance of the meeting.

### **Statement of agreed facts**

The panel considered a statement of agreed facts which was signed by Mr Christopher North on 4 August 2023.

## Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

The panel carefully considered the case and reached a decision.

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

Mr Christopher North had been employed as the head of computing and digital learning at The Hall School ('the School') between 1 September 2015 and 16 March 2022. On 16 March 2022, Mr North was arrested by police. Mr North pleaded guilty to 3 counts of making an indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of a child and one count of possession of a Class A drug.

## 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. On or around 31 May 2022, you were convicted of:**
  - a. three counts of making an indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of a child**
  - b. Possessing a controlled drug (Class A – Cocaine)**

The allegations were admitted and were supported by evidence presented to the panel within the bundle.

In the signed statement of agreed facts presented to the panel, Mr North admitted to making 2 still Category A indecent images of a child, 7 still Category B indecent images of a child and 4 still Category C indecent images of a child. It was noted in the transcript of the sentencing hearing included within the bundle that none of the images for which Mr North appeared before the court were images of pupils at the School but were stills which had been downloaded from the internet.

The panel was presented with a certificate of conviction from Snaresbrook Crown Court dated 31 May 2022.

The panel accepted the certificate of conviction contained within the bundle as conclusive proof of the conviction and the facts necessarily implied by the conviction.

Mr North had pleaded guilty to the offences.

In relation to allegation 1a, the panel had sight of the transcript of the sentencing hearing at which Mr North was sentenced on 31 May 2022 to:

- three sentences of imprisonment running concurrently, the longest being 12 months imprisonment. All 3 sentences were suspended for 24 months;
- Sexual Harm Prevention Order for a period of 10 years;
- Sex Offenders Register for 10 years;
- Rehabilitation activity requirements;
- Curfew requirements.

In relation to allegation 1b, the panel had sight of the transcript of the sentencing hearing at which Mr North was sentenced on 31 May 2022 to pay a fine of £200 or in default to serve 14 days imprisonment.

The allegations were therefore, found proved.

## **Findings as to conviction of a relevant offence**

Having found the allegations proved, the panel went on to consider whether the facts of those proved allegations amounted to a conviction of a relevant offence.

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

- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by
  - having regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions
- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach.
- Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

Although there was no evidence that Mr North had failed to safeguard pupils at the School, the panel noted that the indecent photographs were of children who would likely have been pupils somewhere.

The panel noted that the individual's actions were relevant to teaching, working with children and working in an education setting. Although the indecent photographs were not of pupils at the School, the panel noted that the conviction related to making indecent

photographs or pseudo-photographs of a child considered to be of secondary school age. Mr North was in a position of trust and responsibility as head of computing and digital learning at the School. He had a duty to act as a role model and the panel considered that his actions fell far short of the standard of behaviour expected of a teacher.

The panel noted that the behaviour involved in committing the offence would have been likely to have had an impact on the safety or security of pupils or members of the public. Although there was no suggestion that harm had been caused to pupils at the School, the panel noted that the photographs were of children considered to be of secondary school age. As mentioned in the transcript of the sentencing hearing, each child in the photographs was a real child to whom harm was caused.

The panel also took account of the way the teaching profession is viewed by others. The panel considered that Mr North's behaviour in committing the offence would be likely to affect public confidence in the teaching profession, if Mr North was allowed to continue teaching.

The panel noted that Mr North's behaviour ultimately led to sentences of imprisonment, (albeit that they were suspended), which was indicative of the seriousness of the offences committed, and which the Advice states is likely to be considered "a relevant offence".

This was a case concerning an offence involving viewing, making, or possessing any indecent photograph or image or indecent pseudo photograph or image of a child, or permitting any such activity, including one-off incidents and possession (including for personal use) of any class A drugs. The Advice indicates that a conviction for any offence that relates to or involves such offences is likely to be considered "a relevant offence".

In relation to the gravity of the offences, the panel considered these to be very serious offences.

The panel was not aware of any mitigating circumstances in relation to the commission of the offences.

Although the panel found that the evidence of Mr North's teaching proficiency was of note, the panel also found that the seriousness of the offending behaviour that led to the conviction was relevant to Mr North's fitness to be a teacher. The panel considered that a finding that these convictions were for relevant offences was necessary to reaffirm clear standards of conduct so as to maintain public confidence in the teaching profession.

## **Panel's recommendation to the Secretary of State**

Given the panel's findings in respect of a conviction of a relevant offence, 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 is appropriate, the panel had to consider the public interest, the seriousness of the behaviour and any mitigation offered by Mr North and whether a prohibition order is necessary and proportionate. Prohibition orders should not be given in order to be punitive, or to show that blame has been apportioned, although they are likely to have punitive effect.

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

In the light of the panel's findings against Mr North, which involved a conviction of a relevant offence, there was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, given the serious nature of the offence.

Similarly, the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr North 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 North was outside that which could reasonably be tolerated.

Whilst Mr North had been a teacher for a number of years, the panel considered that the adverse public interest considerations above outweigh any interest in retaining Mr North in the profession, since his behaviour fundamentally breached the standard of conduct expected of a teacher.

The panel considered carefully the seriousness of the behaviour, noting that the Advice states that the expectation of both the public and pupils, is that members of the teaching profession maintain an exemplary level of integrity and ethical standards at all times.

The panel took further account of the Advice, which suggests that a panel will likely consider a teacher's behaviour to be incompatible with being a teacher if there is evidence of one or more of the factors that begin on page 15. In the list of such factors, those that were relevant in this case were:

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers' Standards;
- the commission of a serious criminal offence, including those that resulted in a conviction or caution, paying particular attention to offences that are "relevant matters" for the purposes of the Police Act 1997 and criminal record disclosure;



- any activity involving viewing, taking, making, possessing, distributing or publishing any indecent photograph or image or indecent pseudo photograph or image of a child, or permitting such activity, including one-off incidents.

Even though the behaviour found proved in this case indicated that a prohibition order would be appropriate, taking account of the public interest and the seriousness of the behaviour and the likely harm to the public interest were the teacher be allowed to continue to teach, the panel went on to consider the mitigation offered by the teacher and whether there were mitigating circumstances.

The panel considered that Mr North's actions, in respect of all allegations found proven, were deliberate. There was no evidence to suggest that Mr North was acting under extreme duress, e.g., a physical threat or significant intimidation. Mr North was convicted of 3 counts of making an indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of a child and the panel noted that this was not a one-off incident.

Mr North did have a previously good history.

The panel saw no evidence that showed Mr North was previously subject to disciplinary proceedings or warnings.

Although in sentencing the Judge referred to Mr North as a "well-regarded" teacher and "a talented and loved teacher", the panel noted that no references were provided to it from any colleagues that could attest to his abilities as a teacher.

The panel noted that Mr North had pleaded guilty to the offences at the first opportunity and had cooperated with the police investigation.

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.

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

The panel was of the view that prohibition was both proportionate and appropriate. The panel decided that the public interest considerations outweighed the interests of Mr North. The conviction on 3 counts of making indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of a child was a significant factor in forming that opinion. Accordingly, the panel made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that a prohibition order should be imposed with immediate effect.

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

The Advice indicates that there are cases involving certain conduct where it is likely that the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of not offering a review period. One of these includes any activity involving viewing, taking, making, possessing, distributing or publishing any indecent photograph or image or indecent pseudo photograph or image of a child, including one off incidents. Mr North was convicted on 3 counts of making indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of a child. In the transcript of the sentencing hearing available to the panel, it was noted that Mr North had downloaded indecent images of a child from the internet, ranging from Category A to Category C indecent images.

The Advice indicates that there are cases involving certain conduct where it is likely that the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of a longer period before a review is considered appropriate. One of these includes possession (including for personal use) of any Class A drug. The panel found that Mr North was responsible for possession of a small amount of a Class A drug, consistent with personal use.

The panel had sight of the transcript of the whole sentencing hearing. In mitigation, it was put forward that Mr North was previously of good character, was deeply sorry for his actions and took full responsibility. It was further noted that Mr North had taken steps to address his offending behaviour and was keen to take part in any and all steps that he could to prevent reoffending in the future. The panel has not seen the character evidence produced for the criminal hearing and has no evidence as to Mr North's progression in rehabilitation.

The panel decided that the findings indicated a situation in which a review period would not be appropriate and, as such, decided that it would be proportionate, in all the circumstances, for the prohibition order to be recommended without provisions for a review period.

## **Decision and reasons on behalf of the Secretary of State**

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

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

In this case, the panel has found all of the allegations proven and found that those proven facts amount to a relevant conviction.

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

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

- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by
  - having regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions
- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach.
- Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

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

The findings of misconduct are particularly serious as they include a finding of a conviction of a relevant offence, including making indecent images of a child and possession of a Class A drug.

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 a relevant offence, 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 North, 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/or safeguard pupils. The panel has observed, "In the light of the panel's findings against Mr North, which involved a conviction of a relevant offence, there was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, given the serious nature of the offence." 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 had sight of the transcript of the whole sentencing hearing. In mitigation, it was put forward that Mr North was previously of good character, was deeply sorry for his actions and took full responsibility. It was further noted that Mr North had taken steps to address his offending behaviour and was keen to take part in

any and all steps that he could to prevent reoffending in the future. The panel has not seen the character evidence produced for the criminal hearing and has no evidence as to Mr North's progression in rehabilitation." I have given this element some weight in reaching my decision.

I have gone on to consider the extent to which a prohibition order would maintain public confidence in the profession. The panel observe, "The panel also took account of the way the teaching profession is viewed by others. The panel considered that Mr North's behaviour in committing the offence would be likely to affect public confidence in the teaching profession, if Mr North was allowed to continue teaching." I am particularly mindful of the finding of involving a conviction for making indecent images of a child in this case and the impact that such a finding has on the reputation of the profession.

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

I have considered whether the publication of a finding of a relevant conviction, 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 North and the panel comment "Although in sentencing the Judge referred to Mr North as a "well-regarded" teacher and "a talented and loved teacher", the panel noted that no references were provided to it from any colleagues that could attest to his abilities as a teacher."

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

In this case, I have placed considerable weight on the panel's comments concerning risk of harm. The panel has said, "The panel noted that the behaviour involved in committing the offence would have been likely to have had an impact on the safety or security of pupils or members of the public. Although there was no suggestion that harm had been caused to pupils at the School, the panel noted that the photographs were of children considered to be of secondary school age. As mentioned in the transcript of the sentencing hearing, each child in the photographs was a real child to whom harm was caused."

I have also placed considerable weight on the finding of the panel that "Whilst Mr North had been a teacher for a number of years, the panel considered that the adverse public interest considerations above outweigh any interest in retaining Mr North in the

profession, since his behaviour fundamentally breached the standard of conduct expected of a teacher.”

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Mr North has made to the profession. In my view, it is necessary to impose a prohibition order in order to maintain public confidence in the profession. A published decision, in light of the circumstances in this case, does not in my view satisfy the public interest requirement concerning public confidence in the profession.

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

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

I have considered the panel’s comments “The Advice indicates that there are cases involving certain conduct where it is likely that the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of not offering a review period. One of these includes any activity involving viewing, taking, making, possessing, distributing or publishing any indecent photograph or image or indecent pseudo photograph or image of a child, including one off incidents. Mr North was convicted on 3 counts of making indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of a child. In the transcript of the sentencing hearing available to the panel, it was noted that Mr North had downloaded indecent images of a child from the internet, ranging from Category A to Category C indecent images.”

The panel went on to say “The Advice indicates that there are cases involving certain conduct where it is likely that the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of a longer period before a review is considered appropriate. One of these includes possession (including for personal use) of any Class A drug. The panel found that Mr North was responsible for possession of a small amount of a Class A drug, consistent with personal use.”

In this case, factors mean that allowing a review period is not sufficient to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. These elements are the seriousness of the findings and the risk to children.

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

**This means that Mr Christopher North is prohibited from teaching indefinitely and cannot teach in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children’s home in England.** Furthermore, in view of the seriousness of the allegations found proved against him, I have decided that Mr North shall not be entitled to apply for restoration of his eligibility to teach.

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

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SABuxcey', with a horizontal line underneath the first few letters.

**Decision maker: Sarah Buxcey**

**Date: 11 October 2023**

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