



Teaching  
Regulation  
Agency

# **Mr Neil Hansford: Professional conduct panel outcome**

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

**September 2023**

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

<b>Teacher:</b>	Mr Neil Hansford
<b>Teacher ref number:</b>	1937666
<b>Teacher date of birth:</b>	11 March 1978
<b>TRA reference:</b>	21200
<b>Date of determination:</b>	29 September 2023
<b>Former employer:</b>	High Storrs School, Sheffield

### **Introduction**

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened virtually on 28 to 29 September 2023 to consider the case of Mr Neil Hansford.

The panel members were Mrs Christine McLintock (teacher panellist – in the chair), Ms Claire Shortt (teacher panellist) and Mr Duncan Tilley (lay panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Mr Delme Griffiths of Blake Morgan LLP solicitors.

The presenting officer for the TRA was Ms Reka Holos of counsel, instructed by Kingsley Napley LLP solicitors.

Mr Hansford was not present and was not represented.

The hearing took place in public and was recorded.

## **Allegation**

The panel considered the allegation set out in the notice of hearing dated 28 June 2023.

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

**Between April 2022 and June 2022, he took heroin, a Class A drug, on one or more occasions**

Mr Hansford admitted the facts of the allegation.

However, he denied that his actions amounted to unacceptable professional conduct or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute

## **Preliminary application**

### **Application to proceed in the absence of Mr Hansford**

The panel considered an application from the presenting officer to proceed in the absence of Mr Hansford.

The panel accepted the legal advice provided in relation to this application and took account of the various factors referred to it.

The panel was satisfied that the Notice of Hearing ("the Notice") had been sent in accordance with the Teacher Misconduct: Disciplinary Procedures for the Teaching Profession ("the Procedures") and that the requirements for service had been satisfied.

Mr Hansford was clearly aware of the proceedings and had fully engaged with the TRA, confirming on several occasions that he would not be attending.

The panel went on to consider whether to proceed in Mr Hansford's absence or to adjourn, in accordance with Rule 5.47 of the Procedures.

The panel had regard to the fact that its discretion to continue in the absence of a teacher should be exercised with caution and with close regard to the overall fairness of the proceedings. The panel gave careful consideration to the fact that Mr Hansford would not be in attendance and would not be represented at this hearing, should it proceed, and the extent of the disadvantage to him as a consequence.

On balance, the panel decided that the hearing should continue in the absence of Mr Hansford for the following reasons in particular:

- The panel was satisfied that Mr Hansford's absence was voluntary, and he had waived his right to attend. Not only had he clearly indicated he would not be present, but he had provided cogent reasons for his position.
- Whilst Mr Hansford initially suggested, in his response to the Notice, that he believed he would be represented by a representative from his union, the nominated individual had not responded to several communications from the TRA. Further, in his most recent statement, Mr Hansford had made no reference to this issue. Ultimately, it was Mr Hansford's responsibility to ensure that all necessary arrangements were in place if he wished to be represented. The TRA had made reasonable efforts in that regard. On balance and in all the circumstances, the panel concluded that Mr Hansford had waived his right to representation.
- In addition, the extent of any disadvantage to Mr Hansford was mitigated by the fact that he had made admissions in relation to the allegation and he had presented documentation in mitigation, including a signed witness statement. In doing so he stated:

*"I do not think there is anything to add that is not covered in this response or at the disciplinary process and it is not my intention to repeat any of this."*

- There was also no indication that Mr Hansford might attend at a future date. As such, the panel concluded that no purpose would be served by an adjournment, which had not been requested by Mr Hansford.
- Finally, there is a public interest in proceedings concluding within as short as period as possible, subject always to the need to ensure a fair hearing. In this instance, Mr Hansford was referred to the TRA in October 2022 and there was a need for finality. It was also stated by Mr Hansford that he wished matters to conclude such that it was in his interests for these proceedings to now reach a conclusion.

Having decided that it was appropriate to proceed, the panel would strive to ensure that the proceedings were as fair as possible in the circumstances, bearing in mind that Mr Hansford would not be present or represented.

## Summary of evidence

### Documents

In advance of the hearing, 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 hearing and response – pages 5 to 11

Section 3: Teaching Regulation Agency witness statements – pages 12 to 15

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 16 to 125

Section 5: Teacher documents – pages 126 to 145

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

## **Witnesses**

The panel heard oral evidence from Witness A who was called by the TRA. Witness A is employed by Minerva Learning Trust as [REDACTED] of High School Storrs.

## **Decision and reasons**

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

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

On 19 April 2022, Mr Hansford commenced employment at High Storrs School ("the School") as a maths teacher providing maternity cover. He was a newly qualified teacher.

In June 2022, a disclosure was made to the School regarding Mr Hansford using heroin, following an incident on or around 12 June 2022 that led to his [REDACTED].

In response to this information, the School referred the matter to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and commenced a disciplinary process.

Subsequently, in October 2022, the School referred Mr Hansford to the TRA.

In relation to the single allegation before it, which was admitted by Mr Hansford, the panel confirmed it had not relied upon any findings made, or opinions expressed, during the earlier disciplinary process or subsequently.

Further, insofar as there were references to other concerns raised in relation to Mr Hansford, this evidence was disregarded other than to the extent that it was relevant contextually. The panel limited its findings to the allegation set out in the Notice of Hearing.

## **Findings of fact**

The findings of fact are as follows:

The panel found the following particulars proved, for these reasons:

**Between April 2022 and June 2022, you took heroin, a Class A drug, on one or more occasions**

The panel heard oral evidence from Witness A, [REDACTED], in relation to the relevant chronology of events.

On 13 June 2022, the School received a telephone call from Mr Hansford's partner, who reported that he had taken an [REDACTED].

At that point, the School was not provided with specific details as regards what had occurred.

However, following the LADO referral the School was given further information regarding Mr Hansford's drug use, in particular heroin. The panel was informed that heroin is a Class A drug pursuant to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

During the course of the School's disciplinary process, Mr Hansford admitted to his use of heroin.

Mr Hansford repeated that admission in his various responses to the TRA. He provided a detailed account of his personal history, the events that led to his [REDACTED] on 12 June 2022 and his subsequent efforts to rehabilitate.

With specific reference to the allegation before the panel and whilst Mr Hansford challenged various aspects of the evidence presented to it, he fully accepted that on at least one occasion in this period he took heroin.

On the basis of Mr Hansford's admission, which was consistent with the evidence before the panel, it found the allegation proved whereby Mr Hansford did take heroin on at least one occasion between April and June 2022.

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

Having found the allegation proved, the panel went on to consider whether the facts of the proved allegation 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 Hansford, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers' Standards. The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Mr Hansford 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 ....
- 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.

In addition to the breaches of the standards identified, the panel also considered whether Ms Hansford's conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences listed on pages 12 and 13 of the Advice.

The Advice indicates that where behaviours associated with such an offence exist, a panel is likely to conclude that an individual's conduct would amount to unacceptable professional conduct.

In this case, the panel found that the offence of possession of Class A drugs was, very clearly, relevant.

Over and above these matters, the panel had regard to the fact that at no point did Mr Hansford report to the School that he had a dependency upon or issue with drugs. The panel considered this raised concerns as to Mr Hansford's understanding of safeguarding.

Whilst there was no evidence that Mr Hansford used drugs at the School or that he was ever under the influence of drugs whilst in the presence of pupils, Mr Hansford's actions were illegal. His actions therefore contravened the School's Code of Conduct for Staff.

Accordingly, whilst the use of heroin may have taken place outside the education setting, it was directly relevant to the way he fulfilled his teaching role. The panel also took account of the fact that, having taken heroin and been [REDACTED], Mr Hansford was unable to perform his duties as a teacher. That had a consequential impact on the School.

The panel was also satisfied that Mr Hansford's actions may have led to pupils being exposed to, or influenced by, this behaviour in a harmful way had they been made aware of it, not least having regard to the Class A nature of the drug taken.

For all these reasons, the panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Hansford amounted to misconduct of a serious nature which fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

Accordingly, the panel concluded that Mr Hansford was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct.



In relation to whether Mr Hansford's actions may have brought the profession into disrepute, 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.

For the reasons set out above, the findings of misconduct are serious, and the conduct displayed would also be likely to have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher, potentially damaging the public perception. The panel considered that a parent may well have been shocked and troubled to learn that a teacher was using heroin, an illegal Class A drug.

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

In summary, having found the facts of the allegation proved, the panel further found that Mr Hansford'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 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 and other members of the public, the maintenance of public confidence in the profession and declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct.

In the light of the panel's findings against Mr Hansford, which involved illegal possession and use of a Class A drug, there was a strong public interest consideration in the protection of pupils and other members of the public. As the panel had determined, his actions were directly relevant to the way he fulfilled his teaching role.

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

To the contrary, the panel did not consider that there was a strong public interest consideration in retaining the teacher in the profession. Mr Hansford was a newly qualified teacher at the point at which he commenced work at the School. Such evidence as there was regarding his practice was not wholly positive. Further, whilst he had showed regret for the loss of his career, there was limited evidence of a passion for education and teaching.

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 Hansford.

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 Hansford. 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, relevant in this case was:

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers' Standards.

Whilst the list of behaviours did not allude to the possession and use of Class A drugs, the panel considered this was also incompatible with being a teacher.

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.

In the light of the panel's findings, it considered the following mitigating factors were present in this case:

- There was evidence that Mr Hansford was dealing with personal challenges at the time of these events. However, whilst his personal circumstances may have had an impact on his actions, the panel concluded that this did not exculpate him from wrongdoing in any respect. He remained responsible for his own actions, which were deliberate.
- Mr Hansford was a very inexperienced, newly qualified teacher.

- Mr Hansford had taken steps to address his drug dependency. However, having regard to some of the comments made by Mr Hansford, such as with reference to the enjoyment he derived from heroin, and in the absence of medical evidence, the panel concluded that Mr Hansford was still on a journey toward rehabilitation.
- There was no evidence of any direct harm to pupils or that Mr Hansford used Class A drugs at the School.
- Mr Hansford had engaged in these proceedings and admitted the allegation.
- Mr Hansford had apologised for his actions and recognised and accepted that he had fallen short of the standards expected of him. To that extent, he had shown some regret and remorse.

Weighed against these matters, the panel considered there were aggravating factors present, including:

- Mr Hansford's actions amounted to a clear breach of the Teachers' Standards.
- In the panel's view, Mr Hansford had shown limited insight. In a large part, his focus was upon what he felt to be shortcomings in the evidence presented against him and his own position rather than where it should have been, on the nature and implications of his actions.
- Mr Hansford had used a Class A drug and his actions were illegal.
- At no point did Mr Hansford report to the School that he had a dependency upon, or any issue, with drug abuse. This raised concerns to the panel as to Mr Hansford's understanding of safeguarding. He acted secretly and there was reference to the methods by which he acquired heroin, namely via the dark web, that were concerning.
- Mr Hansford was in a position of trust and responsibility as a teacher and a role model to pupils. He should have sought professional support at the point at which he recognised that his drug use was likely to have an impact on his professional duties and his standing in the profession.

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.

Having carefully considered the specific circumstances of this case and taking account of the mitigating and aggravating features present, 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.

The panel concluded that prohibition was both proportionate and appropriate. It decided that the public interest considerations outweighed the interests of Mr Hansford.

The fact that Mr Hansford had used an illegal Class A drug, coupled with the limited insight shown by Mr Hansford, were significant factors in forming that opinion. Mr Hansford did not fully recognise the inappropriate nature of his actions. In the panel's view, he had not taken full responsibility for his actions. There appeared to be limited progression between the submissions he made in the School's disciplinary process to what was submitted in these proceedings by Mr Hansford. It followed, at the present time, the panel was satisfied that there was a risk of repetition.

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 behaviours that, if proved, would militate against the recommendation of a review period. None of these were relevant in this case.

Nonetheless, the panel decided that it would be proportionate, in all the circumstances, for the prohibition order to be recommended with no provision for a review period, for the following reasons in particular.

The panel had regard to the fact that prohibition orders should not be given in order to be punitive. However, it determined that Mr Hansford's actions were fundamentally incompatible with his being a teacher.

Further, whilst the panel noted from the Advice that possession and use of Class A drugs was likely to weigh in favour of a longer review period, the nature of Mr Hansford's actions and the limited insight he had shown, warranted no review in this case.

Mr Hansford had sufficient time and opportunity to demonstrate that he was capable of full remediation, to show that he had gained insight and to take responsibility for his actions. He had failed to do so.

The panel therefore 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. The public interest considerations that Mr Hansford's behaviour gave rise to were such that this was necessary and appropriate.

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

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

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

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

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

In particular, the panel has found that Mr Hansford 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 ....
- 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 Hansford fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The findings of misconduct are particularly serious as they include a finding of taking a Class A drug on one or more occasions.

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 likely to 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 Hansford, 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 considered that “There was no evidence of any direct harm to pupils or that Mr Hansford used Class A drugs at the School.” However the panel also considered that concerns about Mr Hansford’s understanding of safeguarding were raised by the fact that he did not report to the school that he had a dependency on or issue with drugs. The panel also noted the impact on the school of Mr Hansford being [REDACTED] and unable to perform his duties as a teacher. The panel also noted that it was “satisfied that Mr Hansford's actions may have led to pupils being exposed to, or influenced by, this behaviour in a harmful way had they been made aware of it, not least having regard to the Class A nature of the drug taken.” 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. On remorse, the panel found “Mr Hansford had apologised for his actions and recognised and accepted that he had fallen short of the standards expected of him. To that extent, he had shown some regret and remorse.” On insight, the panel found that “Mr Hansford had shown limited insight. In a large part, his focus was upon what he felt to be shortcomings in the evidence presented against him and his own position rather than where it should have been, on the nature and implications of his actions.”

In my judgement, the lack of full insight means that there is some risk of the repetition of this behaviour and this puts at risk the future wellbeing of pupils. I have therefore given this element considerable weight in reaching my decision.

I have gone on to consider the extent to which a prohibition order would maintain public confidence in the profession. The panel observe, “public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Hansford were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession.” I am particularly mindful of the findings on the illegal possession and use of a Class A drug in this case and the impact that such a finding has on the reputation of the profession.

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

I have considered whether the publication of a finding of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct likely to bring the profession into disrepute, 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 Hansford himself. The panel comment “Mr Hansford was a newly qualified teacher at the point at which he

commenced work at the School. Such evidence as there was regarding his practice was not wholly positive. Further, whilst he had showed regret for the loss of his career, there was limited evidence of a passion for education and teaching.”

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Hansford 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 the lack of insight or remorse. The panel has said that Mr Hansford had shown limited insight and that “Mr Hansford did not fully recognise the inappropriate nature of his actions. In the panel’s view, he had not taken full responsibility for his actions.”

The panel also notes that “Mr Hansford had taken steps to address his drug dependency. However, having regard to some of the comments made by Mr Hansford, such as with reference to the enjoyment he derived from heroin, and in the absence of medical evidence, the panel concluded that Mr Hansford was still on a journey toward rehabilitation.”

In the panel’s view there is a risk of repetition of his actions.

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

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

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

I have considered the panel’s comments that “it determined that Mr Hansford’s actions were fundamentally incompatible with his being a teacher” and “the nature of Mr Hansford’s actions and the limited insight he had shown, warranted no review in this case”. I have also considered the panel’s comment that “Mr Hansford had sufficient time and opportunity to demonstrate that he was capable of full remediation, to show that he had gained insight and to take responsibility for his actions. He had failed to do so.”

I recognise the seriousness nature of this case and that Mr Hansford has admitted to taking a Class A drug. I have also noted that the published Advice concerning the prohibition of teachers indicates that possession of a Class A drug is one of the circumstances in which a longer review period is likely to be in the public interest and

have greater relevance, but that it is not one of the circumstances which would point to no review period.

I have considered the panel's comments about the aggravating factors in this case. I have noted that Mr Hansford has shown limited insight and has not demonstrated that he is capable of full remediation. However, I have also had regard to the panel's comment that he has taken steps to address his drug dependency but is still on the journey towards rehabilitation.

On balance, I do not support the panel's recommendation of no review period. I have taken the view that a review period would be appropriate to allow Mr Hansford the opportunity to develop full insight and to demonstrate full rehabilitation. However a two-year review period is not sufficient to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession because of the seriousness of this case, the lack of full insight and the aggravating factors.

I consider therefore that a four-year review period is required to satisfy the maintenance of public confidence in the profession, whilst providing Mr Hansford with the opportunity to demonstrate full insight and that there would be no risk of repetition if he were to return to the teaching profession.

**This means that Mr Neil Hansford 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 12 October 2027, four years from the date of this order at the earliest. This is not an automatic right to have the prohibition order removed. If he does apply, a panel will meet to consider whether the prohibition order should be set aside. Without a successful application, Mr Hansford remains prohibited from teaching indefinitely.



**Decision maker: David Oatley**

**Date: 4 October 2023**

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