



Teaching  
Regulation  
Agency

# **Mr Paul Woodford: Professional conduct panel outcome**

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

**December 2023**

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

<b>Teacher:</b>	Mr Paul Woodford
<b>Teacher ref number:</b>	0965874
<b>Teacher date of birth:</b>	16 April 1978
<b>TRA reference:</b>	20081
<b>Date of determination:</b>	15 December 2023
<b>Former employer:</b>	Wykeham Primary School, Neasden

### **Introduction**

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened virtually on 15 December 2023, to consider the case of Mr Paul Woodford.

The panel members were Ms Dawn Hawkins (teacher panellist – in the chair), Mrs Kristen Hughes (lay panellist), and Mr Andrew Harries (lay panellist).

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

The presenting officer for the TRA was Ms Leila Chaker of Counsel.

Mr Paul Woodford was not present and was not represented.

The hearing took place in public and was recorded.

## **Allegations**

The panel considered the allegations set out in the Notice of Proceedings dated 5 October 2023.

It was alleged that Mr Paul Woodford was convicted of a relevant offence, at any time, in that:

1. On 8 October 2021, he was convicted of six counts of making an indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of a child.

Mr Woodford did not respond to the Notice of Proceedings and so, in the absence of a response, the panel took the allegations as not being admitted.

## **Preliminary applications**

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

The panel was provided with a bundle of documents relating to the service of the main hearing bundle as part of the presenting officer's application to proceed in the absence of Mr Woodford. Those documents were not served in accordance with the requirements of paragraph 5.36 of the Procedures, and as such the panel was required to decide whether those documents should be admitted under paragraph 5.34 of the Procedures at the discretion of the panel.

Under paragraph 5.33 of the Procedures, the panel may admit any evidence, where it is fair to do so, which may reasonably be considered to be relevant to the case.

The panel was satisfied that the documents were relevant to the case as the documents showed the efforts to contact Mr Woodford and the communication with him. The panel decided to admit the documents.

The panel was satisfied that the TRA complied with the service requirements of paragraph 19 a to c of the Teachers' Disciplinary (England) Regulations 2012, (the "Regulations").

The panel was also satisfied that the Notice of Proceedings complied with paragraphs 5.23 and 5.24 of the Teacher Misconduct: Disciplinary Procedures for the Teaching Profession, (the "Procedures").

The panel determined to exercise its discretion under paragraph 5.47 of the Procedures to proceed with the hearing in the absence of the teacher.

The panel took as its starting point the principle from R v Jones that its discretion to commence a hearing in the absence of the teacher has to be exercised with the utmost care and caution, and that its discretion is a severely constrained one. In considering the question of fairness, the panel has recognised that fairness to the professional is of prime importance but that it also encompasses the fair, economic, expeditious and efficient disposal of allegations against the professional, as was explained in GMC v Adeogba & Visvardis.

In making its decision, the panel has noted that the teacher may waive his right to participate in the hearing. The panel firstly took into account the various factors drawn to its attention from the case of R v Jones [2003] 1 AC 1.

The panel was satisfied from the evidence presented to it, including emails, letters and a note of a telephone call with Mr Woodford, that Mr Woodford had been made aware of the proceedings.

The panel did not consider that an adjournment would result in the teacher attending at a later date.

The panel has not identified any significant gaps in the documentary evidence provided to it and should such gaps arise during the course of the hearing, the panel may take such gaps into consideration in considering whether the hearing should be adjourned for such documents to become available and in considering whether the presenting officer has discharged the burden of proof. The panel is also able to exercise vigilance in making its decision, taking into account the degree of risk of the panel reaching the wrong decision as a result of not having heard the teacher's account.

The panel decided to proceed with the hearing in the absence of the teacher. The panel considered that in light of the teacher's waiver of his right to appear and taking account of the inconvenience an adjournment would cause and the likelihood that this would result in Mr Woodford attending, that on balance, these are serious allegations and the public interest in this hearing proceeding within a reasonable time was in favour of the hearing continuing.

## **Summary of evidence**

### **Documents**

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

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

Section 2: Notice of hearing and response – pages 5 to 16

Section 3: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 17 to 136

In addition, the panel decided to admit the following documents:

Service bundle – pages 137 to 195

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

## **Witnesses**

The panel did not hear any oral evidence.

## **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 Woodford had been employed at Wykeham Primary School (the 'School') since 29 April 2014. On 23 April 2019, the [REDACTED] was advised by the police that it had credible evidence that Mr Woodford may have indecent images of children on his devices at home. On 24 April 2019, Mr Woodford was suspended pending a police investigation. A disciplinary hearing was held by the School on 13 May 2021.

## **Findings of fact**

The findings of fact are as follows:

The panel found the following particulars of the allegation against you proved, for these reasons:

**On 8 October 2021, you were convicted of six counts of making an indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of a child.**

The allegation was supported by evidence presented to the panel, notably the certificate of conviction.

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

The panel noted that this was not a one off offence. Mr Woodford was sentenced for making 21 indecent images, 12 Category B images and 6 Category C images on one computer. In addition, he was sentenced for an offence of making 61 Category A images, 46 Category B images and 71 Category C images on another computer.

Mr Woodford was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment suspended for 18 months and 150 hours of unpaid work. A Sexual Harm Prevention Order for 10 years was made

under section 103 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and Mr Woodford was listed on the Sex Offenders Register for 10 years.

The allegation was therefore, found proved.

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

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Mr Woodford, in relation to the facts it found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers' Standards. The panel considered that by reference to Part 2, Mr Woodford 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 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 noted that Mr Woodford's actions were relevant to teaching, working with children and working in an education setting. The panel had sight of the sentencing remarks and noted that the images were of young and vulnerable children, and the age group of those children aligned with the pupils he was teaching.

The panel noted that the behaviour involved in committing the offence would have been likely to have had an impact on the safety and security of pupils and members of the public.

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

The panel noted that Mr Woodford's behaviour ultimately led to a sentence of imprisonment, (albeit that it was 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, taking, making, possessing, distributing or publishing any indecent photograph or image or indecent pseudo photograph or image of a child, or permitting any such activity, including one-off incidents.

The Advice indicates that a conviction for any offence that relates to or involves such offences is likely to be considered “a relevant offence”.

The panel considered that there were a number of factors which increased the gravity of the offence, which aligned with the sentencing remarks. The panel noted reference in the sentencing remarks and police report to the images depicting young and vulnerable children and that Mr Woodford had deliberately carried out searches for such images. The sentencing remarks described the images found on Mr Woodford’s devices as ‘disturbing’.

Mr Woodford did not provide mitigation evidence to the panel. The panel took into account the reference in the sentencing remarks to the effort Mr Woodford had made to understand the effect of his offences through attending an offending behaviour programme voluntarily. [REDACTED]. The panel did not have sight of any presentence report and had no evidence as to Mr Woodford’s current understanding and insight into his actions.

The panel had sight of references for Mr Woodford from former colleagues, provided as part of Mr Woodford’s job application at the School. These stated Mr Woodford was “extremely open minded and enthusiastic” and his “relationship with pupils was good based on mutual respect”. Mr Woodford had taught at the School for 5 years prior to his suspension.

Although the panel found that there was no criticism of Mr Woodford’s teaching proficiency, the panel also found that the seriousness of the offending behaviour that led to the conviction was relevant to Mr Woodford’s fitness to be a teacher. The panel considered that a finding that this conviction was for a relevant offence 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 Woodford 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 also considered the interest of retaining the teacher in the profession.

In the light of the panel's findings against Mr Woodford, which involved a conviction for six counts of making an indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of a child, there was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, given the young children depicted in the indecent images.

Similarly, the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Woodford were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession. The convictions relate to serious offences which the public would regard as incompatible with being a teacher.

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 Woodford was outside that which could reasonably be tolerated.

The panel decided that there was a public interest consideration in retaining the teacher in the profession, since no doubt had been cast upon his abilities as an educator. The panel had sight of references attesting to Mr Woodford's teaching abilities and to being a 'good team member', provided in 2014/2015 for the purposes of Mr Woodford applying for the job at the School. However, no recent references were provided from any colleagues that attested to Mr Woodford's abilities as a teacher.

Whilst there is evidence that Mr Woodford had ability as an educator, the panel considered that the adverse public interest considerations above outweigh any interest in retaining Mr Woodford in the profession, since his behaviour fundamentally breached the standards 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;
- misconduct seriously affecting the education and/or safeguarding and well-being of pupils, and particularly where there is a continuing risk;
- 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 some of 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 whether there were mitigating circumstances.

Mr Woodford's actions were deliberate. The sentencing remarks presented to the panel stated that there was evidence that Mr Woodford had carried out deliberate searches for images of young children. It was earlier commented that the images found on Mr Woodford's devices were disturbing.

There was no evidence to suggest that Mr Woodford was acting under extreme duress, e.g. a physical threat or significant intimidation and, in fact, the panel found Mr Woodford's actions to be calculated and motivated.

Mr Woodford did have a previously good history. His employment record was unblemished and the sentencing remarks stated that Mr Woodford was of 'previous good character'.

The panel saw no evidence that showed that Mr Woodford had been subject to prior disciplinary proceedings or warnings.

The panel did note the reference in the sentencing remarks to Mr Woodford's 'genuine' remorse and that Mr Woodford had pleaded guilty at the earliest opportunity. [REDACTED]. The panel had no evidence as to Mr Woodford's current insight or remorse into his actions. The panel noted that Mr Woodford received a custodial sentence, albeit suspended, highlighting the seriousness of the offence.

## **Proportionality**

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 Woodford 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 Woodford. The conviction for making indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs 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 cases 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. The panel found that Mr Woodford was convicted of numerous counts of making indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children.

The panel noted that Mr Woodford had voluntarily attended an offending behaviour programme and was of previous good character. However, the panel was not provided with evidence as to Mr Woodford's level of insight or remorse and considered that there could be a risk of repetition of the offending behaviour.

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 Paul Woodford should be the subject of a prohibition order, with no provision for a review period.

In particular, the panel has found that Mr Woodford 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 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 Woodford 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 for the offence of making an indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of a child for which Mr Woodford received a suspended prison sentence.

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 conviction, 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 Woodford, 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 noted that “the images were of young and vulnerable children, and the age group of those children aligned with the pupils he was teaching.” The panel has also noted that “the behaviour involved in committing the offence would have been likely to have had an impact on the safety and security of pupils and members of the public.” 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 has set out as follows, “The panel did note the reference in the sentencing remarks to Mr Woodford’s ‘genuine’ remorse and that Mr Woodford had pleaded guilty at the earliest opportunity. [REDACTED]. The panel had no evidence as to Mr Woodford’s current insight or remorse into his actions. The panel noted that Mr Woodford received a custodial sentence, albeit suspended, highlighting the seriousness of the offence.” 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 has observed that “public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Woodford were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession. The convictions relate to serious offences which the public would regard as incompatible with being a teacher.” I am particularly mindful of the finding of a conviction for the very serious offence of making an indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph 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 Woodford himself. The panel has commented, “The panel decided that there was a public interest consideration in retaining the teacher in the profession, since no doubt had been cast upon his abilities as an educator. The panel had sight of references attesting to Mr Woodford’s teaching abilities and to being a ‘good team member’, provided in 2014/2015 for the purposes of

Mr Woodford applying for the job at the School. However, no recent references were provided from any colleagues that attested to Mr Woodford's abilities as a teacher."

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Woodford 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 comment that "Whilst there is evidence that Mr Woodford had ability as an educator, the panel considered that the adverse public interest considerations above outweigh any interest in retaining Mr Woodford in the profession, since his behaviour fundamentally breached the standards of conduct expected of a teacher."

The panel found that there were factors which increased the gravity of the offence committed by Mr Woodford and pointed to the "reference in the sentencing remarks and police report to the images depicting young and vulnerable children and that Mr Woodford had deliberately carried out searches for such images."

I have also placed considerable weight on the panel's comments concerning the lack of evidence of current insight or remorse. The panel has said that it "was not provided with evidence as to Mr Woodford's level of insight or remorse and considered that there could be a risk of repetition of the offending behaviour."

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Mr Woodford 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 insight and remorse, 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 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 cases 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. The panel found that Mr Woodford was convicted of numerous counts of making indecent photographs or pseudo-photographs of children."

I have considered whether not allowing a review period reflects the seriousness of the findings and is a proportionate period to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence

in the profession. 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 very serious nature of the offences of which Mr Woodford was convicted and the lack of current evidence of either insight or remorse.

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 Paul Woodford 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 allegation found proved against him, I have decided that Mr Woodford 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 Woodford 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 'D Oatley', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

**Decision maker: David Oatley**

**Date: 19 December 2023**

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