



Teaching
Regulation
Agency

Miss Laura Telford: Professional conduct panel outcome

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

June 2024

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

Teacher: Miss Laura Telford

TRA reference: 18923

Date of determination: 14 June 2024

Former employer: The Holt School, Wokingham, Berkshire

Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened on 10 and 14 June 2024 by way of a virtual hearing, to consider the case of Miss Laura Telford.

The panel members were Mr Richard Young (lay panellist – in the chair), Mrs Carolyn Roberts (teacher panellist) and Mrs Shelley Barlow Ward (teacher panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Mr Graham Miles of Blake Morgan solicitors.

The presenting officer for the TRA was Ms Matilda Hesleton of Browne Jacobson LLP solicitors.

Miss Laura Telford was present and was represented Mr Jerome Burch of counsel.

The hearing was recorded and took place in public save that the evidence of Miss Telford and parts of the submissions were heard in private.

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of proceedings dated 28 March 2024.

It was alleged that Miss Laura Telford was guilty of having been convicted of a relevant offence, in that:

1. On or around 2 January 2020, she was convicted of driving a motor vehicle after consuming so much alcohol that the proportion of it in her breath, blood or urine exceeded the prescribed limit on 5 July 2019 contrary to the Road Traffic Act 1988 s.5(1)(a) and Schedule 2 of the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988.
2. On or around 2 January 2020, she was convicted of [REDACTED] (a relevant offence) on 5 July 2019 contrary to [REDACTED].

Miss Telford admitted that she was convicted of the offences concerned and further admitted that the convictions were for relevant offences.

Preliminary applications

Application to admit late documents

The panel considered an application on behalf of Miss Telford for the admission of documents not served more than four weeks in advance of the hearing. This consisted of an additional 30 pages of documents. Ms Hesleton made no objection to the application and the panel agreed to admit the additional documents.

Application for part of hearing to take place in private

The panel considered an application on behalf of Miss Telford that her evidence be given in private. No objection was made to this application on behalf the TRA. The panel determined that Miss Telford be permitted to give the whole of her evidence in private. The panel was satisfied that this would enable Miss Telford to provide her best evidence in relation to matters of a sensitive personal nature in respect of which her rights of privacy outweighed the public interest. The hearing would otherwise take place in public, save that the panel would go into private session to hear submissions in relation to the two areas identified by Mr Jerome Burch.

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 5 to 6

Section 2: Notice of referral response, statement of agreed facts and notice of proceedings – pages 8 to 43

Section 3: Teaching Regulation Agency witness statements – pages 45 to 147

Section 4: Teacher documents – pages 149 to 166

In addition, the panel agreed to accept further documents submitted on behalf of Miss Telford comprising an additional 30 pages.

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.

In the consideration of this case, the panel had regard to the document Teacher Misconduct: Disciplinary Procedures for the Teaching Profession 2018, (the “Procedures”).

Witnesses

The panel heard oral evidence from Miss Laura Telford.

Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

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

Between 1 September 2012 and 23 February 2020, Miss Laura Telford was employed as a part-time teacher of Mathematics at the Holt School (‘the School’). On 5 July 2019, Miss Telford was involved in a collision with another vehicle when driving her car. [REDACTED] was a passenger in the car at the time. After providing a positive breath test at the scene, Miss Telford was arrested and taken to the police station where she provided further samples of breath, which showed that the proportion of alcohol in her breath exceeded the prescribed limit to drive.

On 12 July 2019 Miss Telford was interviewed under caution by a police officer from [REDACTED]. During the course of this interview, Miss Telford admitted that [REDACTED] had been in the car with her [REDACTED] when the collision occurred on 5 July 2019. During the interview, Miss Telford said that, prior to the collision, she had

spent the day with [REDACTED] at Thorpe Park and that she had only drunk one pint of cider during the day, but had drunk vodka the night before. Miss Telford also admitted buying a large bottle of vodka on her way to Thorpe Park and decanting some into a bottle of water. Miss Telford denied being drunk when at Thorpe Park and maintained that she had been capable of caring for [REDACTED] whilst there. However, when shown CCTV footage from Thorpe Park, Miss Telford acknowledged that she did appear to be intoxicated in the footage.

On 2 January 2020, Miss Telford appeared at Berkshire Magistrates' Court when she pleaded guilty to driving with excess alcohol and [REDACTED]. Her case was adjourned until 4 February 2020 when Miss Telford was sentenced for the offences. The sentence included a Community Order and disqualification from driving for 33 months. On 23 March 2020, Miss Telford resigned from her position at the School.

Findings of fact

The findings of fact are as follows:

It was alleged that you have been convicted of a relevant offence, in that:

- 1. On or around 2 January 2020, you were convicted of driving a motor vehicle after consuming so much alcohol that the proportion of it in your breath, blood or urine exceeded the prescribed limit on 5 July 2019 contrary to the Road Traffic Act 1988 s.5(1)(a) and Schedule 2 of the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988.**

Miss Telford admitted that she had been convicted of this offence and signed a statement of agreed facts to that effect. The panel was also provided with a memorandum of conviction from Berkshire Magistrates' Court, which the panel was advised should be treated as conclusive proof of commission of the offence. This confirmed that the recorded level of alcohol in Miss Telford's breath was 153 microgrammes in 100 millilitres of breath. The legal limit was 35 microgrammes of alcohol in 100 millilitres of breath.

The panel found allegation 1 proved.

- 2. On or around 2 January 2020, she was convicted of [REDACTED] (a relevant offence) on 5 July 2019 contrary to [REDACTED].**

Miss Telford admitted that she had been convicted of this offence and signed a statement of agreed facts to that effect. The panel also treated the memorandum of conviction from Berkshire Magistrates' Court as conclusive proof of commission of the offence.

The panel noted that, in addition to being disqualified from driving for 33 months, Miss Telford was made the subject of a community order which contained alcohol treatment and unpaid work requirements for Miss Telford to meet by 3 February 2021. Miss Telford

was required to carry out 150 hours of unpaid work under the supervision of the responsible officer. She was also required to have [REDACTED].

The panel found allegation 2 proved.

Findings as to conviction of a relevant offence

Having found the allegations proven, the panel went on to consider whether the convictions were for relevant offences. The panel noted that Miss Telford admitted that the convictions were for relevant offences. The panel took these admissions into account, but made its own determinations.

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 Miss Telford, in relation to the facts it found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers’ Standards. The panel considered that by reference to Part 2, Miss Telford was in breach of the following standard:

- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school.

The panel also took account of the way the teaching profession is viewed by others. The panel considered that Miss Telford’s behaviour in committing the offences could affect public confidence in the teaching profession, given the influence that teachers may have on pupils, parents and others in the community.

This was a case concerning an offence of [REDACTED] and a serious driving offence, involving alcohol, which the Advice indicates are likely to amount to relevant offences.

The panel took into account the [REDACTED] that Miss Telford was facing at the time which affected her decision-making. However, these issues, though significant, were outweighed by the fact she chose to drive with [REDACTED] in the car when she must have known that she was significantly over the legal limit. Furthermore, Miss Telford accepts that she consumed alcohol at the park and also took a bottle of vodka with her, some of which she decanted into a water bottle. The sentence imposed by the court, including an extended disqualification from driving, reflected the seriousness of the offence.

Although the panel found that the evidence of Miss Telford’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 her suitability to teach. 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 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 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 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 other members of the public, the maintenance of public confidence in the profession and declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct.

There was a public interest consideration in respect of protection of other members of the public given the nature of the offence of driving with excess alcohol.

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

In addition to the public interest considerations set out above, the panel went on to consider whether there was a public interest in retaining Miss Telford in the profession. The panel decided that there was a public interest consideration in retaining the teacher in the profession, since no doubt had been cast upon her abilities as an educator and she 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 Miss Telford.

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 Miss Telford. 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;
- the commission of a serious criminal offence
- failure in their duty of care towards a child, including exposing a child to risk or failing to promote the safety and welfare of the children (as set out in Part 1 of KCSIE);

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.

Miss Telford did have a previously good history, both as an accountant and as a teacher. The panel was also presented with a number of positive character references and testimonials, including from former work colleagues. One of these stated:

'She has always been the consummate professional and students regularly turn to her for advice and guidance as she is always so approachable. She is also an excellent mathematician and has supported students in achieving great results in their exams. Not only is she a fantastic teacher, she is also a great team player who has always supported our department and colleagues when they needed help.'

There was no evidence to suggest that Miss Telford was acting under duress. However, the panel heard that, [REDACTED]. The assessment of the probation service was that Miss Telford's [REDACTED] at the time of the offences was a major disinhibiting factor in her actions, causing a lack of consequential thinking. In view of her [REDACTED], the panel accepted that Miss Telford's actions were not deliberate in the circumstances of this case.

The panel noted an email from the probation service which confirmed that Miss Telford complied with the requirements of the community order by completing 150 hours of unpaid work and the [REDACTED] requirement imposed.

[REDACTED].

Miss Telford expressed regret and remorse for her poor judgment in her statement and, in the view of the panel, demonstrated insight into her failings, for which she had sought help professionally and from family and friends.

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 by the panel would be sufficient.

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 the teacher 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/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute and/or a relevant conviction.

The panel has recommended that the findings of a relevant conviction should be published and that such an action is proportionate and in the public interest.

In particular, the panel has found that Miss Telford 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.

The panel finds that the conduct of Miss Telford fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The findings of misconduct are serious as they include relevant convictions for an offence involving [REDACTED] and a serious driving offence.

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 Miss Telford, 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. While the panel has noted that Miss Telford's convictions included one for behaviour involving [REDACTED] there is no evidence recorded, nor any suggestion raised, that she posed a risk to pupils.

I have also taken into account the panel's comments on insight and remorse, which it sets out as follows:

“Miss Telford expressed regret and remorse for her poor judgment in her statement and, in the view of the panel, demonstrated insight into her failings, for which she had sought help professionally and from family and friends.”

The panel also notes [REDACTED]. In my judgment, the degree of insight and remorse demonstrated by Miss Telford means that there is a limited risk of the repetition of this behaviour.

I have gone on to consider the extent to which a prohibition order would maintain public confidence in the profession. The panel records the following:

“The panel also took account of the way the teaching profession is viewed by others. The panel considered that Miss Telford's behaviour in committing the offences could affect public confidence in the teaching profession, given the influence that teachers may have on pupils, parents and others in the community.”

I am particularly mindful of the finding of relevant convictions in this case for an offence involving [REDACTED] and a serious driving offence and the negative impact that such a finding could have 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 Miss Telford herself. The panel notes that:

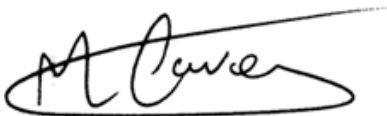
“Miss Telford did have a previously good history, both as an accountant and as a teacher. The panel was also presented with a number of positive character references and testimonials, including from former work colleagues.”

A prohibition order would prevent Miss Telford from teaching. A prohibition order would also clearly deprive the public of her 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 significant degree of insight and remorse demonstrated by Miss Telford, as well as the mitigating circumstances noted by the panel and the contribution she has made to the profession. I have also placed considerable weight on the panel’s concluding remarks:

“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 the teacher 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.”

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 'M. Cavey', enclosed within a hand-drawn oval.

Decision maker: Marc Cavey

Date: 26 June 2024

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