



Teaching  
Regulation  
Agency

# **Ms Isabel Lawrence: Professional conduct panel meeting outcome**

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

**September 2024**

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

**Teacher:** Ms Isabel Lawrence

**TRA reference:** 0022349

**Date of determination:** 16 September 2024

**Former employer:** Tyndale Community School, Oxford

### **Introduction**

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened on 16 September 2024 by virtual means, to consider the case of Ms Isabel Lawrence.

The panel members were Mr Alan Wells (former teacher panellist – in the chair), Mrs Christine Cunniffe (teacher panellist) and Mrs Shabana Robertson (lay panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Mrs Luisa Gibbons 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 Ms Lawrence that the allegations be considered without a hearing. Ms Lawrence provided a signed statement of agreed facts and admitted unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. The panel considered the case at a meeting without the attendance of the presenting officer Mr Alexander Barnfield of Capsticks LLP, Ms Lawrence or her representative, Rose Smith of Doyle Clayton.

The meeting took place in private and recorded.

## **Allegations**

The panel considered the allegation set out in the notice of meeting dated 3 July 2024.

It was alleged that Ms Lawrence was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, in that while employed as a teacher at Tyndale Community School (“the School”):

1. On 5 July 2023, she attended the School and/or taught a class whilst under the influence of alcohol.

Ms Lawrence admitted the facts of the allegation and that she was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

## **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 and list of key people – pages 3 to 4

Section 2: Notice of referral, response and notice of meeting – pages 5 to 23

Section 3: Statement of agreed facts and presenting officer representations – pages 24 to 27

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 28 to 48

Section 5: Teacher documents – pages 49 to 61

The panel also received:

- a witness statement of the teacher - pages 62 – 73
- identification key - pages 74
- further teacher documents – pages 75 to 178.

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

## Statement of agreed facts

The panel considered a statement of agreed facts which was signed by Ms Lawrence on 31 May 2024.

## 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 Ms Lawrence for the allegation 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.

Ms Lawrence was employed as a primary school classroom teacher at the School from 1 September 2022 on a one year fixed-term contract. During a lesson on 5 July 2023, concerns were raised about Ms Lawrence. Ms Lawrence was suspended on 7 July 2023 and was referred to the TRA on 24 July 2023.

## 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:

### **Whilst employed as a teacher at Tyndale Community School (“the School”)**

- 1. On 5 July 2023, you attended the School and/or taught a class whilst under the influence of alcohol.**

In the statement of agreed facts, Ms Lawrence admitted that she attended the School on 5 July 2023. She confirmed that she had not drunk alcohol before arriving at the School on 5 July 2023 but had done so during the morning break time. In Ms Lawrence’s witness statement for these proceedings, she stated that she had left the school at the first morning break, went to the shop around the corner and purchased a bottle of wine. She stated that she drank some of it and returned to her classroom after the break.

In the statement of agreed facts, Ms Lawrence admitted that after the break that she taught a year 4 class, and was under the influence of alcohol whilst teaching the class. She accepted that Witness 1 – [REDACTED] had raised concerns with Witness 2 – [REDACTED] during the lesson and that Witness 1 had described Ms Lawrence as seeming “spaced out” and having “slurred” speech. Ms Lawrence also admitted that

Witness 2 entered the classroom and described Ms Lawrence as seeming “spaced out”, “swaying from side to side” and like she “didn’t have control of the class”. Ms Lawrence admitted that Witness 2 asked her to leave the class.

Ms Lawrence also admitted having sent an email and WhatsApp message on 6 July 2023 to Witness 2 stating:

“at the time I was upset and unfortunately I decided that I needed a drink [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

The panel has seen contemporaneous written statements by Witness 1 and Witness 2 that describe what they observed of Ms Lawrence’s demeanour during the lesson. Witness 2 and Witness 3 – [REDACTED] provided accounts of Ms Lawrence’s demeanour that they observed in Witness 2’s office following the lesson, all of which correlated with Ms Lawrence having consumed alcohol. The panel has also seen Ms Lawrence’s email to Witness 2 following the incident. The panel considered that this evidence corroborated Ms Lawrence’s admissions and that it was more likely than not that Ms Lawrence had attended the School and/or taught a class whilst under the influence of alcohol.

The panel found this allegation proven.

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

Having found the allegation proved, the panel went on to consider whether the facts of those proved allegations amounted to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

In doing so, the panel had regard to the document Teacher Misconduct: The Prohibition of Teachers, which is referred to as “the Advice”.

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Ms Lawrence in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers’ Standards. The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Ms Lawrence 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.

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Ms Lawrence in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of Keeping Children Safe In Education (“KCSIE”). The panel considered that Ms Lawrence failed to have regard to her responsibility to provide a safe environment in which children can learn. The panel noted that the class was a year 4 class.

The panel was satisfied that the conduct of Ms Lawrence fell significantly short of the standard of behaviour expected of a teacher.

The panel also considered whether Ms Lawrence’s conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences in the list that begins on page 12 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. The panel found that none of these offences was relevant.

The panel noted that the Advice is not intended to be exhaustive and there may be other behaviours that panels consider to be unacceptable professional conduct. The panel considered that Ms Lawrence risked the effects of alcohol affecting her judgment and decision making when teaching a class of pupils, thereby risking the safety of pupils.

Accordingly, the panel was satisfied that Ms Lawrence was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct.

The panel went on to consider whether Ms Lawrence was guilty of conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

The panel took into account the way the teaching profession is viewed by others, the responsibilities and duties of teachers in relation to the safeguarding and welfare of pupils 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.

In considering the issue of disrepute, the panel also considered whether Ms Lawrence’s conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences in the list that begins on page 12 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 conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. The panel found that none of these offences was relevant.

The panel noted that the advice is not intended to be exhaustive and there may be other behaviours that panels consider to be “conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute”. The panel considered that parents and members of the public would not

expect a teacher to be under the influence of alcohol when in school, given the inherent risks to safeguarding and the standard of teaching.

The panel considered that Ms Lawrence's conduct could potentially damage the public's perception of a teacher.

The panel therefore found that Ms Lawrence's actions constituted 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 is appropriate, the panel had to consider the public interest, the seriousness of the behaviour and any mitigation offered by Ms Lawrence 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 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 safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils; the maintenance of public confidence in the profession; declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct; and the interest of retaining the teacher in the profession.

There was a public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, given the serious finding that Ms Lawrence consumed alcohol immediately before teaching a class of pupils.

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

At the time of the incident, Ms Lawrence was approaching the end of the first year of her two-year early career teacher training induction. The panel considered that Ms Lawrence has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the profession and that there was a strong public interest consideration in retaining her in the profession.



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;

misconduct seriously affecting the education and/or safeguarding and well-being of pupils...;

abuse of position or trust (particularly involving vulnerable pupils); and

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, 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 Ms Lawrence and whether there were mitigating circumstances.

There was no evidence that Ms Lawrence's actions were not deliberate.

There was also no evidence to suggest that Ms Lawrence decision to consume alcohol before teaching her class was because she was acting under extreme duress, e.g. physical threat or significant intimidation.

Ms Lawrence's email to Witness 2 of the following day referred an incident with a pupil and having let it "get the better of [her]." She referred to the pupil's aggression towards her having been quite frightening and that she probably had not communicated enough to Witness 2 the impact it had had on her. She stated that she had been told that the pupil would be returning to her class the following week, and made a "very poor error of judgement" [REDACTED]

Representations from Ms Lawrence [REDACTED] provided background that she had applied to work at the School for the first year of her two year early career teacher training induction, and from the first day was faced with aggressive behaviour from children, unlike her placements during her PGCE training. She described the School as a "tough inner-city school" and that she had applied as it was in a deprived area, where she thought she wanted to teach. Ms Lawrence's representations stated that a week before the incident, [REDACTED] and was transferred into her class. She stated that on the second day of being in her class, the pupil threw items, including chairs at her and the

other children, causing the rest of the class to be evacuated, and leaving her alone with the pupil. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

In Ms Lawrence's witness statement for these proceedings, she explained that the day before the child returned to her class, she had been told that she would never be in the classroom alone without an ELSA providing constant one to one supervision of the child. She stated that this was confirmed to her on the morning of 5 July by the ELSA, but later on the same day the ELSA told her she could only provide the support to Ms Lawrence for 15 – 20 minutes in the morning and would "pop into the classroom" for 5 minutes later in the day. She explained that she was shocked and frightened by this and started to panic. Having been told this, she stated that she left the school at the first morning break and went to the shop around the corner from the school and purchased a bottle of wine and drank some of it, [REDACTED]. She accepted that her behaviour afterwards would no doubt have been impacted by her consumption of alcohol, but that she would not have expected it to have as much as an impact as it did. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Ms Lawrence did have a previously good history, but there was no evidence that she had demonstrated exceptionally high standards in both her personal and professional conduct or of having contributed significantly to the education sector, given that Ms Lawrence was at such an early stage of her career. Ms Lawrence's representations stated that she had mentioned very early on to senior members of the School that she was struggling to cope with her class of 27 children, a third of which had Special Educational Needs. She referred to a lack of support to develop herself as an early career teacher and with hindsight, believed she had picked the wrong school for her at that time of her career. She also referred to having felt unsupported by the School with the challenging behaviour she was facing from her class.

In Ms Lawrence's witness statement prepared for these proceedings, she referred to having initially had a class of 26 children which quickly rose to 30 children, and other than having a teaching assistant for typically a couple of hours each day in the morning, she was otherwise alone with the class. She explained that the out-of-class support session was often cancelled due to staff shortages, leaving her without extra time to complete her additional Early Career Framework work.

The panel has seen a reference from [REDACTED] at the Trust which employed Ms Lawrence at the School. Whilst the referee had not met Ms Lawrence, the reference was provided on behalf of the Trust and called into question whether she should be barred from teaching if she had acknowledged her error [REDACTED]

The panel has also seen a reference from a parent expressing her gratitude to Miss Lawrence following the announcement of her departure. This parent stated their child had

been very sad and cried at this, having always said that Miss Lawrence was the best teacher he had had at the School. The panel has seen a thank you card from a pupil referring to her being thought about warmly, and that she was helpful and supporting in a way that “warms the heart”. It thanked her for her kindness, understanding and the difference it had made. Another card from a pupil referred to Ms Lawrence having made year 4 the best year the pupil had had, and not knowing whether she would ever have a teacher better than her. The parent of that pupil referred to the pupil having written the note unprompted, and echoed the pupil’s gratitude, saying thank you for giving her “such a positive year”. A further three notes from pupils expressed similar sentiments.

The day after the incident, Ms Lawrence sent an email to Witness 2. This thanked Witness 1 for speaking with the children in her class, and expressed that she was “incredibly upset, disappointed in [her]self, disgusted by [her] actions, remorseful, sad, angry with [her]self.” It also stated that she would be “absolutely devastated” if she lost her “teaching licence” and that “Teaching is everything to [her]”. The email referred to there being no excuses for her behaviour [REDACTED]. She thanked Witness 2 for “taking a chance on [her]” and stating that she thought it best to take a year off to focus on herself and to conquer her issues, saying that she would do “whatever it takes to ensure this NEVER happens again.” She repeated that she was “absolutely devastated and sorry for letting everyone down”.

In Ms Lawrence’s representations, she stated that she accepted full responsibility for her actions, and that she had no one else to blame except herself. She stated that she had taken time to reflect and with the benefit of hindsight recognised what she could have done differently. She had thought that teaching in an inner-city school would have been where she would have the most impact. However, she stated that she now appreciates that taking a slower approach, and working her way up, with more experience, to a more challenging school would have been a better choice, but that her ambition and desire to improve these children’s education and lives had got the better of her. She referred to having recognised this at the time, and had secured an alternative role elsewhere in a less intense environment, which would have allowed her to look after herself more and develop at a steadier rate. The panel has seen evidence of this alternative offer of employment dated 7 June 2023.

Ms Lawrence also stated in these representations that she wished to use this experience as a learning curve. Whilst she stated that she understood the gravity of the situation and the severity of the circumstances, she does “not want to lose something that [she] hold[s] so dear to [her]self” and wishes to “grow and develop into a better person and ultimately a better teacher”. She also referred to having learnt to recognise when she is beginning to need help and access support at a much earlier stage. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

She referred to alcohol being “no longer in her life”, and teaching being “much much more important to me”.

Her witness statement referred to techniques she would use if she found herself struggling or in stressful circumstances, informed by the strategies she has learnt in her rehabilitation. She also explained how she can identify signs that she might be inclined to be more susceptible to stress. She has also identified the ways she can help herself to reducing her exposure to the risk of triggering circumstances, and steps she would take if spotting the early signs of relapse. She explained that she has used these strategies effectively.

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, 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 Ms Lawrence 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 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 recommended that the findings of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct likely to bring the profession into disrepute, or 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 Ms Isabel Lawrence 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 was satisfied that the conduct of Ms Lawrence involved breaches of the responsibilities and duties set out in statutory guidance Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE).

The panel finds that the conduct of Ms Lawrence fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The findings of misconduct are serious as they involve teaching a class whilst under the influence of alcohol.

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 or 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 Ms Lawrence, and the impact that will have on the teacher, is proportionate and in the public interest.

In this case, I have considered the extent to which a prohibition order would protect children and safeguard pupils. The panel has observed that "Ms Lawrence risked the

effects of alcohol affecting her judgment and decision making when teaching a class of pupils, thereby risking the safety of pupils.” A prohibition order would therefore prevent such a risk from being present in the future.

I have also considered the extent to which the teacher has demonstrated insight and remorse. The panel has noted that, “In Ms Lawrence’s representations, she stated that she accepted full responsibility for her actions, and that she had no one else to blame except herself. She stated that she had taken time to reflect and with the benefit of hindsight recognised what she could have done differently.” The panel has also noted the extensive actions that Ms Lawrence has taken [REDACTED] and that she has “identified the ways she can help herself to reducing her exposure to the risk of triggering circumstances, and steps she would take if spotting the early signs of relapse”. In my judgement, the evidence available to the panel demonstrates that Ms Lawrence has shown clear remorse for her conduct and has full insight, and that this means there is a low risk of repetition. 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 “parents and members of the public would not expect a teacher to be under the influence of alcohol when in school, given the inherent risks to safeguarding and the standard of teaching.” I am particularly mindful of the finding of teaching whilst under the influence of alcohol 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 or 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 Ms Lawrence. The panel has commented that “Ms Lawrence did have a previously good history, but there was no evidence that she had demonstrated exceptionally high standards in both her personal and professional conduct or of having contributed significantly to the education sector, given that Ms Lawrence was at such an early stage of her career.” The panel has also commented:

“At the time of the incident, Ms Lawrence was approaching the end of the first year of her two-year early career teacher training induction. The panel considered that Ms Lawrence has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the profession

and that there was a strong public interest consideration in retaining her in the profession.”

The panel has noted that a reference from [REDACTED] at the Trust which employed Ms Lawrence at the School “called into question whether she should be barred from teaching if she had acknowledged her error and shown that she wanted to deal with her condition.” The panel has also seen expressions of gratitude to Ms Lawrence from parents and pupils.

A prohibition order would prevent Ms Lawrence 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 mitigating factors and that the nature and severity of the behaviour were at the less serious end of the possible spectrum. I have noted Ms Lawrence’s representations to the panel about her [REDACTED] and the challenging circumstances of her teaching role during her first induction year. I have paid particular attention to the panel’s finding that Ms Lawrence has potential to make a valuable contribution to the profession.

Teaching whilst under the influence of alcohol is serious misconduct. However, this case involves a single incident and, the day after this incident, the teacher acknowledged her misconduct and showed clear remorse. Ms Lawrence has accepted full responsibility for her behaviour and has set out the steps she has taken to avoid a repetition of this behaviour in future.

I therefore agree with the panel 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 'D Oatley', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

**Decision maker: David Oatley**

**Date: 18 September 2024**

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