



Teaching
Regulation
Agency

Mr Christopher Jones: Professional conduct panel meeting outcome

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

February 2025

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

Teacher: Mr Christopher Jones

TRA reference: 21596

Date of determination: 12 February 2025

Former employer: Grove Academy

Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened online via Microsoft Teams on 12 February 2025 to consider the case of Mr Christopher Jones.

The panel members were Mr Martyn Stephens (lay panellist – in the chair), Miss Janette McCormick (lay panellist) and Mrs Bev Williams (teacher panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Ms Clare Strickland of Blake Morgan solicitors.

In advance of the meeting, after taking into consideration the public interest and the interests of justice, the TRA agreed to a request from Mr Jones that the allegations be considered without a hearing. Mr Jones provided a signed statement of agreed facts and admitted unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. The panel considered the case at a meeting without the attendance of the presenting officer, Mr Jones or his representative.

The meeting took place in private.

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of meeting dated 31 January 2025.

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

1. While employed at Grove Academy, he brought a knife onto the academy's premises and/or stored the knife within a cupboard which was accessible to one or more pupils;
2. His conduct as may be found proven at allegation 1 placed one or more pupils at risk of injury and/or harm.

Mr Jones admitted the facts alleged, and admitted that his conduct amounted to unacceptable professional conduct and/or 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: Notice of referral and response – pages 6 to 21

Section 2: Statement of agreed facts and presenting officer representations – pages 23 to 3

Section 3: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 41 to 151

Section 5: Teacher documents – pages 154 to 162

Statement of agreed facts

The panel considered a statement of agreed facts which was signed by Mr Jones on 12 November 2024.

Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

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

Mr Jones worked as a pastoral manager at Grove Academy from April 2019 to December 2022. Around November 2022, he brought a knife onto the academy's premises and he stored it within a cupboard which was accessible to one or more pupils. The knife was part of Mr Jones' personal fishing equipment. He stored it in a cupboard in an office shared with a number of other members of staff for a period of approximately 2 weeks. The office was not routinely accessible to pupils, but it was not secured at all times and therefore it was possible that pupils or other staff members could have accessed the knife.

Findings of fact

The findings of fact are as follows:

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

- 1. While employed at Grove Academy, you brought a knife onto the academy's premises and/or stored the knife within a cupboard which was accessible to one or more pupils;**
- 2. Your conduct as may be found proven at allegation 1 placed one or more pupils at risk of injury and/or harm.**

The allegations were admitted and were supported by evidence presented to the panel within the bundle. The panel was satisfied that the admissions were unequivocal. The allegations were therefore found proved.

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

Having found a number of the allegations 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 Mr Jones in relation to the facts found proved involved breaches of the Teachers' Standards. The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Mr Jones 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 also considered whether Mr Jones' conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences listed on pages 10 and 11 of the Advice. The panel found that none of these offences was relevant.

The panel considered very carefully whether Mr Jones' conduct fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession. The panel considered that Mr Jones' explanation for his conduct, which was not disputed, suggested that his conduct was an error, rather than anything deliberate or suggestive of intentional wrongdoing. The panel also considered that while there was a risk of harm to pupils, the likelihood of that risk materialising was low, given that the knife was concealed in a cupboard in an office to which pupils did not routinely have access.

However, in the general context of significant and legitimate public concern about knives and young people, his conduct was serious. Any knives on school premises must be stored safely, having been the subject of a robust risk assessment. Mr Jones failed to ensure that happened. The panel concluded that although the risk of harm materialising was low, the impact, should it materialise, was extremely high. In these circumstances, the panel was satisfied that Mr Jones' conduct did fall significantly short of the standards expected of the profession, and accordingly amounted to unacceptable professional conduct.

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 they behave.

The panel concluded that its findings of misconduct were serious and the conduct displayed would be likely to have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher, potentially damaging the public perception.

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

Having found the facts of the allegations proved, the panel further found that Mr Jones' 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 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 and the protection of other members of the public, the maintenance of public confidence in the profession, declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct, and striking the right balance between the rights of the teacher and the public interest.

In the light of the panel's findings against Mr Jones, which involved keeping a knife on school premises without properly ensuring it presented no risk of harm, there was a public interest consideration in respect of pupil safeguarding. However, the panel was satisfied that given Mr Jones' admission, remorse and insight, there was no risk of his conduct being repeated.

Similarly, the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Jones were not treated seriously when regulating the conduct of the profession.

The panel decided that a public interest consideration in declaring proper standards of conduct in the profession was also present as the conduct found against Mr Jones was outside that which could reasonably be tolerated.

Having regard to the references received from Mr Jones' current school, the panel decided that there was a strong public interest consideration in retaining him in the

profession, since no doubt had been cast upon his abilities as an educator and he is clearly making a valuable contribution to the profession.

Notwithstanding 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 Jones.

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 Jones. 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 are relevant in this case are:

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

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, the teacher's actions were not deliberate in that he had not deliberately set out to commit wrongdoing or cause harm. However, he had knowingly brought a knife onto school premises and kept it there without making it safe. This was a significant error of judgement. He was not acting under duress.

He did have a previously good record and there was very positive evidence about his contribution to teaching since this incident.

The panel was impressed by the evidence from the co-headteachers, [REDACTED] and another teaching colleague at Mr Jones' current school, which he joined in January 2024. They have offered him their support notwithstanding his past error of judgement and the resulting TRA proceedings. They say that when he joined them, he *"went above and beyond with every class he took on, working tirelessly, both inside and outside of school, to ensure that pupils were caught up with content, and above all, that they were enjoying science again"*. He is described as *"an exceptional colleague and employee"*, who is *"devoted to giving all of our students the very best chance of a successful future"*.

The panel was satisfied that there has been no repetition of his misconduct, and that there was no risk of repetition, given the remorse and insight he has shown. He made full admissions and the panel was satisfied that his remorse and insight are genuine.

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, recommending no prohibition order was a proportionate and appropriate response. The nature and severity of the behaviour were at the less serious end of the possible spectrum and Mr Jones presented no future risk of harm. 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 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.

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 conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

The panel has made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that Mr Christopher Jones should not be the subject of a prohibition order. The panel has recommended that the findings of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct likely to bring the profession into disrepute should be published and that such an action is proportionate and in the public interest.

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

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

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

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 Mr Jones, 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:

“In the light of the panel’s findings against Mr Jones, which involved keeping a knife on school premises without properly ensuring it presented no risk of harm, there was a public interest consideration in respect of pupil safeguarding. However, the panel was satisfied that given Mr Jones’ admission, remorse and insight, there was no risk of his conduct being repeated.”

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 was satisfied that there has been no repetition of his misconduct, and that there was no risk of repetition, given the remorse and insight he has shown. He made full admissions and the panel was satisfied that his remorse and insight are genuine.”

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 Jones were not treated seriously when regulating the conduct of the profession.” I am particularly mindful of the finding that Mr Jones had placed pupils at risk of harm by storing a knife on school premises 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 Mr Jones himself. The panel has commented:

“He did have a previously good record and there was very positive evidence about his contribution to teaching since this incident.

“The panel was impressed by the evidence from the co-headteachers, [REDACTED] and another teaching colleague at Mr Jones’ current school, which he joined in January 2024. They have offered him their support notwithstanding his past error of judgement and the resulting TRA proceedings.”

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Jones 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 findings on the insight and remorse shown by Mr Jones and that his “actions were not deliberate in that he had not deliberately set out to commit wrongdoing or cause harm.”

I have also placed considerable weight on the finding of the panel that:

“The nature and severity of the behaviour were at the less serious end of the possible spectrum and Mr Jones presented no future risk of harm. 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.”

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.



Decision maker: David Oatley

Date: 12 February 2025

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