



Teaching
Regulation
Agency

Ms Rebecca Whitehurst: Professional conduct panel outcome

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

September 2025

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

Teacher: Ms Rebecca Whitehurst

Teacher ref number: 9840461

Teacher date of birth: 14 May 1976

TRA reference: 19145

Date of determination: 24 September 2025

Former employer: Wellacre Academy, Manchester

Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened on 23 and 24 September 2025 by way of a virtual hearing, to consider the case of Ms Rebecca Whitehurst.

The panel members were Mrs Julie Wells (teacher panellist – in the chair), Mrs Ashley Emmerson (teacher panellist) and Mr David Moir (lay panellist).

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

The presenting officer for the TRA was Ms Charlotte Watts of Browne Jacobson LLP solicitors.

Ms Whitehurst was not present but was represented by Mr Andrew Faux of Counsel.

The hearing took place in public and was recorded.

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of referral dated 29 August 2025.

It was alleged that Ms Whitehurst was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, in that whilst employed as a teacher at Wellacre Academy between 2016 and 2019:

1. She failed to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A, including by:
 - a. sharing her personal phone number and/or social media details with Pupil A;
 - b. communicating via phone and/or text and/or social media with Pupil A;
 - c. received one or more indecent images of Pupil A;
 - d. received pornographic imagery from Pupil A;
 - e. meeting with Pupil A on one or more occasions outside of School;
 - f. received gifts on one or more occasions from Pupil A.
2. She failed to take appropriate action and/or ensure appropriate action was taken to safeguard Pupil A in or around August 2019, despite receiving on one or more occasion messages from Pupil A in which they wanted to end their life ([REDACTED]).

Ms Whitehurst admits the facts alleged and admits that they amount to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

Summary of evidence

Documents

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

Section 1: Anonymised pupil list – page 6

Section 2: Notice of hearing, notice of referral, response and statement of agreed facts – pages 8 to 36

Section 3: Teaching Regulation Agency witness statements – pages 38 to 96

Section 4: Teaching Regulation Agency documents – pages 98 to 1157

Section 5: Teacher documents – pages 1159 to 1205

In addition, the panel agreed to accept the following:

Section 6: Witness statement of Pupil A (redacted) – pages 1206 to 1214

The panel members confirmed that they had read all of the documents within the bundle, in advance of the hearing and the additional document 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 did not hear oral evidence from any witnesses.

Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

Ms Whitehurst was employed as a teacher of modern and foreign languages at Wellacre Academy (the School) from 1 September 2016 until 18 November 2019. During her employment at the School, she undertook all required annual safeguarding training.

During the academic year of 2018/19, Pupil A was in Year [REDACTED]. On 17 September 2019, after Pupil A had entered Year [REDACTED], Ms Whitehurst notified the School that she had been communicating with Pupil A via their personal mobile phones and over social media. She explained that she had obtained his phone number on a school trip when he was in Year [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] years’ old. She disclosed that he had sent her inappropriate/indecent images of himself. She said she had met him a couple of times outside School and then confirmed this had happened on eight occasions.

On three consecutive days in August 2019, Ms Whitehurst and Pupil A had exchanged a number of messages on social media, including messages in which he expressed suicidal thoughts. She did not report those messages to the School or any external safeguarding authority.

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:

1. You failed to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Pupil A, including by:

a. sharing your personal phone number and/or social media details with Pupil A;

This was admitted by the teacher and was supported by the evidence before the panel.

b. communicating via phone and/or text and/or social media with Pupil A;

This was admitted by the teacher and was supported by the evidence before the panel.

c. received one or more indecent images of Pupil A;

This was admitted by the teacher and was supported by the evidence before the panel.

d. received pornographic imagery from Pupil A;

This was admitted by the teacher in her statement to the panel, and the panel was satisfied that her admission on this point was clear and unequivocal.

e. meeting with Pupil A on one or more occasions outside of School;

This was admitted by the teacher and was supported by the evidence before the panel.

f. received gifts on one or more occasions from Pupil A.

This was admitted by the teacher and was supported by the evidence before the panel.

2. You failed to take appropriate action and/or ensure appropriate action was taken to safeguard Pupil A in or around August 2019, despite receiving on one or more occasion messages from Pupil A in which they wanted to end their life ([REDACTED]).

This was admitted by the teacher and was supported by the evidence before the panel.

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

Having found all of the allegations proved, the panel went on to consider whether the facts of those proven 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 first considered whether the conduct of the teacher, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers’ Standards.

The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, the teacher 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 also considered whether the teacher’s conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences listed on pages 12 and 13 of the Advice.

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

The panel found that the offence of any activity involving viewing, taking, making, possessing, distributing or publishing any indecent photograph or image or pseudo photograph or image of a child, or permitting any such activity, including one-off incidents, was relevant.

The panel considered very carefully the seriousness of the proven facts:

- The panel was satisfied that Ms Whitehurst did not target Pupil A for attention at the outset, and that her breach of professional boundaries started from a desire to help him;
- Ms Whitehurst was aware that Pupil A had particular vulnerabilities before exchanging personal contact details and entering into a relationship with him that breached professional boundaries;
- The conduct took place over a considerable period of time between March and September 2019. It was not an isolated incident;
- The panel considered that over this period there were lots of opportunities for Ms Whitehurst to step away from the situation and seek appropriate help;
- Even accepting Ms Whitehurst's account that she did not request indecent images from Pupil A and that she deleted them immediately after she received them, she did not report receiving them or take any effective action to prevent Pupil A from continuing to send them to her.
- Ms Whitehurst was fully trained in safeguarding and would have been very well aware of the risks of not following statutory and local procedures. Despite this, she failed to follow those procedures.
- This resulted in significant risk of harm to Pupil A, and to Ms Whitehurst and others around her. This harm materialised in that Pupil A exhibited signs of distress as a result of the events flowing from her breach of professional boundaries.
- The panel was concerned about the nature and extent of the communication between Ms Whitehurst and Pupil A. The evidence included almost 1000 pages of messages exchanged between Ms Whitehurst and Pupil A over a few days in August 2019. The language and tone of these messages was suggestive of a deeply personal relationship between them which was wholly inappropriate between a teacher and a [REDACTED]-year-old pupil.

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

In relation to whether Ms Whitehurst's actions amounted to conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, the panel took into account the way the teaching profession is viewed by others. It 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 Whitehurst's conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences in the list that begins on page 12 of the Advice. As set out in the panel's finding on unacceptable professional conduct above, one of those behaviours (relating to indecent images) was relevant.

The panel considered that Ms Whitehurst's conduct could potentially damage the public's perception of a teacher, given the seriousness of her conduct and the risk of harm it presented to a vulnerable child.

For these reasons, the panel found that Ms Whitehurst'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/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, the maintenance of public confidence in the profession, and declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct.

There was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, given the serious findings of a breach of professional boundaries and failures to safeguard.

Similarly, the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Ms Whitehurst 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 Ms Whitehurst 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 Ms Whitehurst in the profession.

The panel decided that there was a public interest consideration in retaining the teacher in the profession, since there was some evidence that before the matters found proved against her, she had been a kind teacher who was proactive and about whom there were no concerns.

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 noted that a teacher's behaviour that seeks to exploit their position of trust should be viewed very seriously in terms of its potential influence on pupils and be seen as a possible threat to the public interest.

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 Ms Whitehurst.

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;
- misconduct seriously affecting the education and/or safeguarding and well-being of pupils, and particularly where there is a continuing risk;
- abuse of position or trust (particularly involving pupils);
- 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;
- failure to act on evidence that indicated a child's welfare may have been at risk e.g. failed to notify the designated safeguarding lead and/or make a referral to children's social care, the police or other relevant agencies when abuse, neglect and/or harmful cultural practices were identified;
- 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.

The panel was satisfied that Ms Whitehurst had not deliberately set out to exploit or harm Pupil A. It was satisfied that her breach of professional boundaries started from a desire to help him. However, this created a set of circumstances in which she made poor choices, and to that extent, her conduct was deliberate.

Similarly, the panel was satisfied that she was not acting under extreme duress. The panel accepts that Ms Whitehurst may have felt somewhat trapped in the situation that her initial actions had created, but the safeguarding framework around her was absolutely clear about what she needed to do, and she chose not to follow it.

The panel concluded that Ms Whitehurst did have a previously good history, and that there had been no previous issues of this sort.

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 Ms Whitehurst 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 Ms Whitehurst.

The limited evidence of insight and remediation before the panel was a significant factor in forming that opinion. The panel recognised that Ms Whitehurst had shown some insight, as demonstrated by her admissions of the facts and that her conduct amounted to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. She had also provided a written statement for the panel to consider, but did not attend the hearing or give evidence in person. She is entitled not to do so, but this meant that the panel did not have an opportunity to explore her insight through questioning.

It was therefore left with the contents of her written statement. In the panel's view, that statement did not demonstrate that she had full insight into the likely impact of her serious misconduct on Pupil A, nor did it clearly demonstrate empathy towards him. Further, the panel had no evidence of any work done by Ms Whitehurst since the events of 2019 to understand and address the risks of her actions.

The panel recognised that in the last six years, Ms Whitehurst had been through a lot, and that her experience would impact on her behaviour now. It recognised that the delay in the resolution of the regulatory proceedings was likely to be exhausting for her, and

that this might have adversely impacted on her ability to show insight and remediate her misconduct. But the fact remains that, in the panel's view, she has not shown sufficient insight or remediation to establish that she would not present a risk to pupils if she were to return to teaching. In these circumstances, the panel needs to recommend restrictive action in order to prevent a risk to pupils and to maintain confidence in the profession.

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 two years.

The Advice indicates that there are certain types of case where, if relevant, the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of not offering a review period.

One of these is 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. Although this factor was engaged, the panel accepted that Ms Whitehurst had not solicited such images from Pupil A, and that she had deleted them immediately on receipt. In these circumstances and the wider circumstances of this case, the panel considered that this factor did not necessarily mean that there should be no review period.

The Advice also indicates that there are certain other types of cases where it is likely that the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of a longer period before a review is considered appropriate. None of the listed characteristics were engaged by the panel's findings.

The panel recognised that these lists are not exhaustive, and considered whether there should be a recommendation for a review. The panel was in no doubt about the seriousness of Ms Whitehurst's misconduct, and that a prohibition order was required, for the reasons outlined above. However, there were some circumstances that meant that a future review might be appropriate:

- She did not deliberately set out to harm a child.
- Her initial motivation was positive.
- Her conduct quickly led her into a very difficult situation in which she made poor choices for some months, but she did eventually do the right thing and report what had happened.

- Through her admissions she has shown some insight.

The panel noted that her current lack of full insight and evidence of full remediation meant that Ms Whitehurst would pose a risk of harm if allowed to return to teaching now. But with work on her part, she could develop that insight and be able to demonstrate that she had remediated the concerns.

The panel carefully considered whether allowing a review period would damage public confidence. It considered that the public would recognise Ms Whitehurst's previous good history and the impact her misconduct has had on her over the last six years. The public would be reassured that the set aside process would mean that she would not be allowed to return to teaching unless she could demonstrate that she had fully remediated her misconduct and had full insight into the causes and consequences of it.

The panel concluded that it would be appropriate to recommend a review period, and that this should be five years. For Ms Whitehurst, the last six years must have been dominated by the proceedings she has faced as a result of her actions. Now that they are concluded, she will need a considerable amount of time to fully work through the issues and be able to demonstrate full insight and remediation. Further, the seriousness of her conduct is such that public confidence demands a significant period of reflection and remediation.

On balance, the panel decided that its findings indicated a situation in which a review period would be appropriate and, as such, decided that it would be proportionate, in all the circumstances, for the prohibition order to be recommended with provision for a review period of five years.

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 unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

The panel has made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that Ms Rebecca Whitehurst should be the subject of a prohibition order, with a review period of five years.

In particular, the panel has found that Ms Whitehurst 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 Ms Whitehurst fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The findings of misconduct are particularly serious as they include findings of a breach of professional boundaries and failures to safeguard, involving a vulnerable pupil.

I have to determine whether the imposition of a prohibition order is proportionate and in the public interest. In considering that for this case, I have considered the overall aim of a prohibition order which is to protect pupils and to maintain public confidence in the profession. I have considered the extent to which a prohibition order in this case would achieve that aim taking into account the impact that it will have on the individual teacher. I have also asked myself, whether a less intrusive measure, such as the published finding of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct likely to bring the profession into disrepute, would itself be sufficient to achieve the overall aim. I have to consider whether the consequences of such a publication are themselves sufficient. I have considered therefore whether or not prohibiting Ms Whitehurst, 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/safeguard pupils. The panel has observed, "There was a strong public interest consideration in respect of the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils, given the serious findings of a breach of professional boundaries and failures to safeguard." 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 sets out as follows, "The panel recognised that Ms Whitehurst had shown some insight, as demonstrated by her admissions of the facts and that her conduct amounted to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. She had also provided a written statement for the panel to consider, but did

not attend the hearing or give evidence in person. She is entitled not to do so, but this meant that the panel did not have an opportunity to explore her insight through questioning.” The panel has also commented “that It was therefore left with the contents of her written statement. In the panel’s view, that statement did not demonstrate that she had full insight into the likely impact of her serious misconduct on Pupil A, nor did it clearly demonstrate empathy towards him. Further, the panel had no evidence of any work done by Ms Whitehurst since the events of 2019 to understand and address the risks of her actions.” In my judgement, the lack of full insight or remorse means that there is some risk of the repetition of this behaviour and this puts at risk the future wellbeing of pupils. I have therefore given this element considerable weight in reaching my decision.

I have gone on to consider the extent to which a prohibition order would maintain public confidence in the profession. The panel observe, “the panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Ms Whitehurst were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession.” I am particularly mindful of the finding of failures to safeguard a pupil in this case and the impact that such a finding has on the reputation of the profession.

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

I have considered whether the publication of a finding of unacceptable professional conduct and conduct likely to bring the profession into disrepute. in the absence of a prohibition order, can itself be regarded by such a person as being a proportionate response to the misconduct that has been found proven in this case.

I have also considered the impact of a prohibition order on Ms Whitehurst herself and the panel comment “The panel concluded that Ms Whitehurst did have a previously good history, and that there had been no previous issues of this sort.”

A prohibition order would prevent Ms Whitehurst 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 “The panel was satisfied that Ms Whitehurst had not deliberately set out to exploit or harm Pupil A. It was satisfied that her breach of professional boundaries started from a desire to help him. However, this created a set of circumstances in which she made poor choices, and to that extent, her conduct was deliberate.”

I have also placed considerable weight on the findings of the panel regarding insight and remorse “The panel recognised that in the last six years, Ms Whitehurst had been through a lot, and that her experience would impact on her behaviour now. It recognised that the delay in the resolution of the regulatory proceedings was likely to be exhausting for her, and that this might have adversely impacted on her ability to show insight and remediate her misconduct. But the fact remains that, in the panel’s view, she has not shown sufficient insight or remediation to establish that she would not present a risk to pupils if she were to return to teaching. In these circumstances, the panel needs to recommend restrictive action in order to prevent a risk to pupils and to maintain confidence in the profession.”

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore, to the contribution that Ms Whitehurst has made to the profession. In my view, it is necessary to impose a prohibition order in order to maintain public confidence in the profession. A published decision, in light of the circumstances in this case, that is not backed up by full insight or 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 a 5 year review period.

I have considered the panel’s comments “The panel concluded that it would be appropriate to recommend a review period, and that this should be five years. For Ms Whitehurst, the last six years must have been dominated by the proceedings she has faced as a result of her actions. Now that they are concluded, she will need a considerable amount of time to fully work through the issues and be able to demonstrate full insight and remediation. Further, the seriousness of her conduct is such that public confidence demands a significant period of reflection and remediation.”

In this case, factors mean that allowing a lesser review period is not sufficient to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. These elements are the seriousness of the findings, involving a vulnerable pupil and the lack of evidence that Ms Whitehurst has demonstrated full insight or remorse.

I consider therefore that a five year review period is required to satisfy the maintenance of public confidence in the profession.

This means that Ms Rebecca Whitehurst is prohibited from teaching indefinitely and cannot teach in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children’s home in England. She may apply for the prohibition order to be set aside, but not until 02 October 2030, 5 years from the date of this order at the earliest. This is

not an automatic right to have the prohibition order removed. If she does apply, a panel will meet to consider whether the prohibition order should be set aside. Without a successful application, Ms Whitehurst remains prohibited from teaching indefinitely.

This order takes effect from the date on which it is served on the teacher.

Ms Whitehurst has a right of appeal to the High Court within 28 days from the date she is given notice of this order.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SABuxcey', with a horizontal line extending from the start of the signature.

Decision maker: Sarah Buxcey

Date: 26 September 2025

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