



Mr Thomas Furnell: Professional conduct panel outcome

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

August 2026

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

Teacher: Mr Thomas Furnell

Teacher ref number: 1880718

Teacher date of birth: 17 January 1990

TRA reference: 20971

Date of determination: 27 August 2026

Former employer: Trinity School and College, Rochester

Introduction

A professional conduct panel (“the panel”) of the Teaching Regulation Agency (“the TRA”) convened on 25 to 27 August 2026 by way of a virtual hearing, to consider the case of Mr Thomas Furnell.

The panel members were Mrs Maxine Cole (lay panellist – in the chair), Mrs Sharon Bhogal (teacher panellist) and Mrs Christine McLintock (teacher panellist).

The legal adviser to the panel was Miss Katie Garcia of Birketts LLP solicitors.

The presenting officer for the TRA was Mr Lee Bridges of Kingsley Napley LLP Solicitors.

Mr Furnell was present and was represented by Jonathan Storey of Cornwall Street Barristers.

The hearing took place in public and was recorded.

Allegations

The panel considered the allegations set out in the notice of proceedings dated 10 June 2026.

It was alleged that Mr Furnell was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute, in that while employed as a teacher at Trinity School and College ('the School') part of Cavendish Education ('the Trust') between February 2018 and June 2022:

1. On one or more occasions between February and March 2022, you informed the Trust and/or the School, that you had obtained the qualifications as listed in Schedule 1, when that was not correct.
2. You provided the School and/or Trust with a falsified "Bachelor of Mathematics and Information Communication Technology (First Class Honours)" certificate dated 21 September 2018 from Open University.
3. On or around 18 January 2022, you submitted to Leadership Learning Securing Excellence (LLSE) your NPQH submission containing;
 - a) a falsified signature purporting to be that of Witness B;
 - b) inaccurate information regarding your placement school.
4. Your conduct, as may be proved at any or all of Allegations 1,2 and 3 above was
 - a) Dishonest;
 - b) Demonstrates a lack of integrity

Schedule 1

Maths and ICT Degree - Open University - September 2013 - July 2017

NVQ Level 4 Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector - University of Essex – July 2012

Maths – B. ICT – B. Physics - C. - Bodmin College - September 2006 - July 2008

GCSE French - D. - Looe Community School - September 2001 – July 2006

Mr Furnell made no admissions in respect of allegations 1, 2, 3(a), 3(b), 4(a) or 4(b).

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 7

Section 2: Notice of hearing and response – pages 8 to 14

Section 3: TRA witness statements – pages 15 to 40

Section 4: TRA documents – pages 41 to 514

In addition, the panel agreed to accept the following:

- Witness Statement of Thomas Furnell – pages 515 to 518
- National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership Certificate - page 519
- OCR Level 5 Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector Certificate – page 520
- Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status certificate – page 521
- Document titled Performance Management Records one (comprising 69 pages) – pages 522 to 591
- Document titled Performance Management Records two (comprising 71 pages) – pages 592 to 663
- Testimonial of Individual A pages 664 to 665

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 when considering sanction.

The panel noted that Mr Furnell did not respond to the formal notice of hearing, provided no written statement, and did not give oral evidence as to the facts of the allegations.

In the consideration of this case, the panel had regard to the document Teacher misconduct: Disciplinary procedures for the teaching profession 2020, (the “Procedures”).

Witnesses

The panel heard oral evidence from the following witnesses called by the presenting officer:

Witness A – [REDACTED]

Witness B – [REDACTED]

Witness C – [REDACTED]

Mr Furnell also gave oral evidence as to sanction.

Decision and reasons

The panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

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

On 16 September 2013, Mr Furnell commenced employment at the School as an unqualified class teacher.

In September 2019, Mr Furnell was appointed as Head of College.

In February 2022, Mr Furnell applied for the position of Headteacher of the School and College, which was a position above his existing role as Head of College.

During the recruitment process, concerns arose regarding representations allegedly made by Mr Furnell about his qualifications and grades, including a degree from the Open University.

In March or April 2022, the School was notified that Mr Furnell had been awarded the National Professional Qualification for Headship ('NPQH') by Leadership Learning Securing Excellence ('LLSE'). Concerns subsequently arose regarding information in his NPQH submission about Ripplevale School ('Ripplevale') and a signature purporting to be that of Witness B, [REDACTED].

Mr Furnell resigned from the School on 3 June 2022.

The matter was referred to the TRA on 18 July 2022.

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. On one or more occasions between February and March 2022, you informed the Trust and/or the School, that you had obtained the qualifications as listed in Schedule 1, when that was not correct.**

The panel considered the Trust's confidential application form completed by Mr Furnell on 26 February 2022. In that form, Mr Furnell stated that he had obtained:

1. a Maths and ICT degree from the Open University September 2013 - July 2017
2. an NVQ Level 4 in Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector from the University of Essex – July 2012;
3. grades B, B and C in Mathematics, ICT and Physics respectively at Bodmin College - September 2006 - July 2008; and
4. grade D in GCSE French at Looe Community School.

The panel had sight of information obtained from the relevant educational institutions and awarding bodies. In particular, the panel had sight of Mr Furnell's AQA general certificate of secondary education, which set out that his French grade from Looe Community School achieved in 2006 was grade E. Although the information provided by Mr Furnell was incorrect, the panel considered that the difference of one grade may have been a typographical error, given that the other grades quoted were correct.

In relation to Bodmin College, the panel considered the witness statement of Individual B and the supporting correspondence and examination records. On 11 October 2023 she provided an email confirming that Mr Furnell did attend Bodmin College between 2006 and 2008 and attached the timetable. She confirmed on 12 October 2022 that the college does not keep copies of certificates but provided Mr Furnell's achieved grades.

This evidence confirmed that Mr Furnell attended Bodmin College between 2006 and 2008 but achieved grades U in Mathematics, U in Physics and E in Information and Communication Technology, rather than the grades B, C and B stated in his application form.

In relation to the University of Essex, the panel considered the witness statement of Individual C and the supporting correspondence. Individual C confirmed that searches undertaken using Mr Furnell's name and date of birth did not identify any student record for him. She also confirmed that the University of Essex did not provide teacher training courses.

In relation to the Open University, the panel considered the documentary evidence from Individual D. In an email dated 8 February 2023, Individual D confirmed that the University did not hold a record of Mr Furnell graduating from the Open University. He noted that his name and date of birth matched to a student record for Thomas Furnell with a middle name of James, but this individual was not awarded a degree, the qualification had begun but was not fully completed. The panel noted that the name Thomas James Furnell appeared upon Mr Furnell's GCSE certificates. The panel was therefore satisfied that Mr Furnell had not obtained the Maths and ICT degree he claimed to hold.

Other than the GCSE French grade, the panel considered that the discrepancies were significant. They concerned qualifications or grades that Mr Furnell had not obtained and were included in an application for promotion to the position of Headteacher of the School and College. The qualifications and grades had been stated clearly and specifically by Mr Furnell in the application form. Save for the GCSE French grade, the panel did not consider that the differences between the qualifications and grades claimed and those actually obtained could reasonably be explained as inadvertent errors.

The panel therefore found, on the balance of probabilities, that Mr Furnell had informed the Trust and/or the School that he had obtained the Open University degree, University of Essex qualification and Bodmin College grades listed in Schedule 1 and a grade D in French from Looe Community School when that was not correct.

The panel found allegation 1 proven.

2. You provided the School and/or Trust with a falsified “Bachelor of Mathematics and Information Communication Technology (First Class Honours)” certificate dated 21 September 2018 from Open University.

The panel considered the certificate held on the School's personnel file, which purported to record that the Open University had awarded Mr Furnell a Bachelor of Mathematics and Information Communication Technology with First Class Honours on 21 September 2018. The panel noted Witness A's evidence that Mr Furnell had provided the certificate to the School, although she was unable to confirm when he had done so. Witness A's supplementary statement recorded that Individual F had received a copy of the certificate and had seen the original but had not independently verified it. The panel was therefore satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that Mr Furnell had provided the certificate to the School.

The panel considered the written statement of Individual D of the Open University, and his email dated 8 February 2023. Individual D confirmed that the University held no record of Mr Thomas Furnell graduating or being awarded a degree. Its records showed that a Mr Furnell had commenced a degree qualification but had not completed it.

Individual D also confirmed that the certificate provided did not match the format, font or degree title used for Open University degree certificates. The certificate number related to a qualification conferred on another individual in 2008 and did not relate to a full degree. He further confirmed that the Acting Vice-Chancellor and Acting University Secretary in September 2018 were Individual G and Individual H respectively. The panel noted the signatures on the certificate provided did not appear to align with those names, but this was not determinative.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Witness A. In her statement, she stated that concerns arose in the first interview for the position of Headteacher of School and College, when Mr Furnell appeared confused as to the classification of his degree from the Open University. In Witness A's written evidence she further stated that during his second interview, Mr Furnell became flustered whilst being questioned about his Open University degree and failed to confirm what classification of degree he had obtained. He had stated that he had obtained an "honours".

Witness A stated that the certificate held on the School's file was subsequently compared with other Open University certificates. A number of apparent anomalies were identified, including the degree title, the signatures, the absence of a security feature and the wording used on the certificate. The panel noted that these initial concerns were subsequently supported by the information provided directly by the Open University to the TRA.

On 18 May 2022, Witness A contacted the Open University to seek verification, but the University initially required Mr Furnell's authority before releasing the information. Witness A requested that authority from Mr Furnell on 23 May 2022. Mr Furnell did not provide this authority and resigned.

Notwithstanding this, the panel relied on the independent evidence from the Open University that Mr Furnell had not been awarded a degree and that the certificate number belonged to a qualification awarded to another individual. The panel was satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that the certificate provided by Mr Furnell to the School and/or Trust was falsified.

The panel found allegation 2 proven.

3. On or around 18 January 2022, you submitted to Leadership Learning Securing Excellence (LLSE) your NPQH submission containing;

- a) a falsified signature purporting to be that of Witness B;**
- b) inaccurate information regarding your placement school.**

The panel considered Mr Furnell's NPQH assessment submission. The submission named "Witness B, Ripplevale School, Cavendish Education" as the placement school

headteacher for Task 2. It contained a signature purporting to be that of Witness B, dated 18 January 2022. The panel noted that the purpose of the verification signatures was to confirm that the submission and supporting documents were accurate and represented a true reflection of the work carried out by Mr Furnell during the NPQH programme.

The panel considered Witness B's email to Witness C, [REDACTED], the providers of the NPQH dated 25 October 2022. In this email she confirmed that the signature was not hers, that she had no knowledge of the submission and that the signature bore no resemblance to her own.

The panel also considered Witness B's written and oral evidence. Witness B unequivocally confirmed that she had not signed Mr Furnell's NPQH submission. She stated in her statement that she was shown the signature page on 16 September 2022 and confirmed that the signature was not hers.

Witness C confirmed that, following direct communication with Witness B, LLSE concluded that the signature was falsified. LLSE, after investigation, revoked Mr Furnell's NPQH qualification.

In light of the clear and consistent evidence of Witness B, supported by the evidence of Witness C and the relevant correspondence, the panel was satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that Mr Furnell's NPQH submission contained a falsified signature purporting to be that of Witness B.

The panel found allegation 3(a) proven.

The panel considered the oral evidence and written statement of Witness B, who stated that the NPQH is for those who are aspiring to becoming a headteacher. The panel considered the information within Mr Furnell's NPQH submission regarding Ripplevale. The submission identified Ripplevale as the placement school for Task 2 and stated that Mr Furnell had analysed the School's finances, staffing, CPD, teacher workload and educational resources. It referred to discussions and surveys of staff. It also referred to discussions with pupils, senior leaders and governors and included a "Ripplevale Whole School IMPACT Action Plan".

The panel considered Witness B's written and oral evidence. She confirmed that Mr Furnell had visited Ripplevale on one occasion, on 26 February 2021, between approximately 8.00 am and 2.00 pm. She explained that Ripplevale had recently joined the Cavendish Education group and that the purpose of the visit was for Mr Furnell to introduce himself and become acquainted with Ripplevale. Witness B explained that the Senior Leadership Team in Ripplevale had also visited Mr Furnell's School. She stated that an NPQH placement or project was not mentioned to her before, during or after Mr Furnell's visit to Ripplevale.

Witness B confirmed that Mr Furnell did not undertake an NPQH project at Ripplevale and did not provide Ripplevale with the action plan contained in his submission. Witness B stated that Ripplevale had no knowledge that it was being identified as his placement school.

The panel took account of Witness C's evidence that, during the Covid-19 pandemic, an NPQH participant was not required to spend face-to-face time at a placement school and that Task 2 required the participant to design, rather than implement, an action plan. The panel also noted that LLSE initially considered Mr Furnell's one-day visit and action plan sufficient to meet the assessment requirements.

However, the NPQH submission represented that Mr Furnell had undertaken a wider process of enquiry and engagement with Ripplevale, including discussions with governors and conducting surveys. Those representations were inconsistent with Witness B's evidence about the nature and purpose of the visit and Ripplevale's lack of knowledge of the purported placement and action plan.

The panel accepted Witness B's clear and consistent evidence and was satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that Mr Furnell had misrepresented his visit and that his NPQH submission contained inaccurate information regarding Ripplevale as his placement school.

The panel found allegation 3(b) proven.

4. Your conduct, as may be proved at any or all of Allegations 1,2 and 3 above was

a) Dishonest;

b) Demonstrates a lack of integrity

The panel considered whether Mr Furnell had acted dishonestly. In doing so, the panel applied the test set out in *Ivey v Genting Casinos (UK) Ltd t/a Crockford*.

The panel first considered Mr Furnell's actual knowledge or belief as to the facts. Mr Furnell had not provided oral or written evidence and there was therefore no direct evidence from him as to his state of mind. The panel considered whether his knowledge or belief could nevertheless be determined from the evidence.

The panel considered that Mr Furnell would have known which qualifications and grades he had obtained, whether he had been awarded a degree by the Open University, whether the signature in his NPQH submission was that of Witness B and the true nature and extent of his involvement with Ripplevale. The conduct concerned several separate and significant matters and could not reasonably be attributed to a mistake or oversight. The panel considered that Mr Furnell's conduct was for the purpose of advancing his professional position which would result in a financial gain.

The panel excluded the inaccurate French GCSE grade from its assessment of dishonesty. Although the information provided was not correct, the panel considered that the difference of one grade may have been a typographical error given that all the other grades that Mr Furnell quoted for his GCSEs were correct.

Applying the second limb in *Ivey*, the panel considered whether Mr Furnell's conduct would be regarded as dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people. The panel was satisfied that ordinary decent people would regard the deliberate misrepresentation of qualifications and grades, the provision of a falsified degree certificate and the submission of a professional qualification assessment containing a falsified signature and inaccurate information as dishonest.

The panel therefore concluded that Mr Furnell's conduct, as found proved in relation to allegations 1, 2 and 3, was dishonest.

The panel found allegation 4(a) proven.

The panel then considered whether Mr Furnell's conduct demonstrated a lack of integrity. In doing so, the panel had regard to the principles set out in *Wingate & Anor v The Solicitors Regulation Authority* and was mindful that professionals are not expected to be "*paragons of virtue*".

The panel considered that Mr Furnell was an experienced teacher and senior leader who was applying for promotion to the position of Headteacher of the School and College. The Trust was entitled to rely on the accuracy of the information he provided about his qualifications and experience.

The panel considered that his conduct was repeated, deliberate and related to matters capable of advancing his professional position with financial gain. The misrepresentation of his qualifications and grades, provision of a falsified degree certificate and submission of an NPQH assessment containing a falsified signature and inaccurate information fell significantly below the ethical standards expected of a teacher and senior school leader.

The panel therefore concluded that Mr Furnell's conduct, as found proved in relation to allegations 1, 2 and 3, demonstrated a lack of integrity.

The panel found allegation 4(b) proven.

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 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 first considered whether the conduct of Mr Furnell, in relation to the facts found proved, involved breaches of the Teachers’ Standards.

The panel considered that, by reference to Part 2, Mr Furnell 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
 - the rule of law.
- 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 considered that Mr Furnell’s conduct involved a repeated course of dishonest conduct concerning his professional qualifications and his NPQH submission. The panel considered that such conduct was in breach of statutory safeguarding provisions and undermined safer recruitment processes. The panel found this conduct was fundamentally incompatible with the standards of and professional conduct expected of a teacher and senior school leader.

The panel also considered whether Mr Furnell’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 fraud or serious dishonesty was relevant. The panel considered that the conduct was deliberate, repeated and with the purpose of securing professional and financial advantage for Mr Furnell. It was not an isolated error of judgment. The conduct concerned qualifications and his NPQH submission that were directly relevant to his application for promotion to the position of Headteacher of the School and College.

The panel considered that schools, pupils, parents and the wider public must be able to trust teachers, particularly those holding or seeking senior leadership positions, to

provide accurate information about their qualifications and professional experience. Mr Furnell's conduct represented a serious departure from that expectation.

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

Accordingly, the panel was satisfied that Mr Furnell was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct.

In relation to whether Mr Furnell'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 Mr Furnell's conduct displayed behaviours associated with any of the offences in the list that begins on page 12 of the Advice.

As set out above in the panel's findings as to whether Mr Furnell was guilty of unacceptable professional conduct, the panel found that fraud or serious dishonesty was relevant. The panel considered that public knowledge of a teacher and senior school leader misrepresenting his qualifications (including his A levels and degree), providing a falsified degree certificate and submitting a professional qualification assessment containing a falsified signature and inaccurate information would be likely to undermine public confidence in the teaching profession.

The findings of misconduct are serious, and the conduct displayed would be likely to have a negative impact on the individual's status as a teacher.

The panel considered that the potential damage to public confidence was heightened by Mr Furnell's senior position and his application for promotion to a headteacher role. Headteachers are entrusted with significant leadership responsibilities and safeguarding responsibilities and are expected to model honesty and integrity to pupils, parents, and staff.

The panel considered that schools operate within a framework founded on assessment, examinations and recognised qualifications. A teacher, particularly one holding or seeking a headteacher position, who misrepresents or falsifies their own qualifications undermines confidence in the framework within which schools operate.

For these reasons, the panel found that Mr Furnell'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 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 protection of other members of the public/the maintenance of public confidence in the profession/declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct.

In the light of the panel's findings against Mr Furnell, which involved stating he had obtained qualifications that he had not, providing the School/Trust with a falsified university certificate and providing an incorrect NPQH submission to the awarding body including a forged signature, there was a strong public interest consideration in the maintenance of public confidence in the profession. The panel considered that members of the public would expect teachers, and particularly those seeking or holding senior leadership positions, to act with honesty and integrity when representing their qualifications and professional experience. Schools must be able to rely on the accuracy of the information and documentation provided by candidates during recruitment and promotion processes. In addition, teachers ensure the integrity and accuracy of their pupils' coursework submissions and so must model this behaviour themselves. Mr Furnell's conduct had the potential to undermine confidence in those processes and in the teaching profession more widely.

The panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Furnell were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession. The education system is founded upon the integrity of assessment and the principle that qualifications are obtained through genuine study, effort and achievement. A teacher, particularly a senior leader, falsely claiming qualifications and relying on falsified documentation for professional and financial gain risks undermining those fundamental principles. A failure to respond appropriately to such conduct could therefore weaken public confidence in the standards upon which the education system is built.

The panel was of the view that a strong public interest consideration in declaring proper standards of conduct in the profession was also present as the conduct found against Mr Furnell was outside that which could reasonably be tolerated. The conduct found proved involved repeated and deliberate dishonesty and undermined safer recruitment practices.

In addition to the public interest considerations set out above, the panel went on to consider whether there was a public interest in retaining Mr Furnell in the profession.

Whilst there was evidence that Mr Furnell had demonstrated good ability as an educator, including positive evidence concerning his teaching, his relationships with pupils and his contribution to the School, the panel considered that the adverse public interest considerations identified above outweighed the public interest in retaining him in the profession. The conduct concerned the qualifications and professional development on which he relied when seeking professional and financial advancement within education and involved the deliberate use of falsified documentation. In doing so, Mr Furnell seriously undermined the standards expected of a teacher.

The panel considered carefully the seriousness of the behaviour, noting that the Advice states that the expectation of both the public and pupils, is that members of the teaching profession maintain an exemplary level of integrity and ethical standards at all times.

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 Mr Furnell.

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;
- dishonesty or a lack of integrity, including the deliberate concealment of their actions or purposeful destruction of evidence, especially where these behaviours have been repeated or had serious consequences, or involved the coercion of another person to act in a way contrary to their own interests;

The panel considered that Mr Furnell's conduct represented a serious departure from the Teachers' Standards because it involved repeated and deliberate dishonesty concerning his qualifications and professional development. He made false representations about qualifications he had not obtained, provided a falsified university certificate and submitted

an incorrect NPQH document containing misrepresented actions at a supposed placement school and a forged signature of its Headteacher.

Even though some of the conduct 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.

There was no evidence that Mr Furnell's actions were not deliberate.

There was no evidence to suggest that Mr Furnell was acting under extreme duress, e.g. a physical threat or significant intimidation.

Mr Furnell did not demonstrate exceptionally high standards in his personal and professional conduct or having contributed significantly to the education sector. The panel did not accept that the incident was out of character because it was repeated and deliberate over a period of time.

The panel took account of Mr Furnell's longstanding commitment to working with vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs, which he explained had been inspired by observing his mother's dedicated work within SEN education and the positive impact she had on the lives of young people.

The panel also acknowledged the positive evidence concerning Mr Furnell's teaching ability and contribution to the School. This included unattributed comments that he was "*the ultimate professional*", that he provided "*fun interactive*" lessons, "*makes lessons fun*" and was "*well liked by students especially those who find school a challenging environment*".

The panel also noted a recognition letter dated 8 January 2014 from Individual E referencing his "*outstanding contribution*" to the development of the School's data programme and shared area.

The panel further considered the testimonial from Individual A, who described Mr Furnell as a "*friendly, supportive and trustworthy colleague*" and stated that pupils "*often looked up to Thomas and regarded him as a positive role model*".

Although the panel accepted that Mr Furnell had demonstrated good ability as an educator and had made a positive contribution to the School, it did not consider that this evidence established exceptionally high standards of personal and professional conduct or a significant contribution to the education sector more widely.

The panel considered whether there were any other mitigating factors, including any demonstrations of insight and remorse.

The panel considered the written statement of Thomas Furnell, dated 24 August 2026. It noted that the statement was prepared before the panel announced its findings of fact and therefore was not written in response to the panel's reasoning. The panel considered this to be significant when assessing the genuineness of the insight expressed.

In particular, Mr Furnell demonstrated an understanding of the importance of honesty and transparency during recruitment. He also acknowledged the particular responsibility placed on senior leaders and recognised that inaccuracies concerning their qualifications may undermine their authority.

Mr Furnell's statement acknowledged that it is particularly serious for a teacher to claim a qualification that they have not properly obtained. The panel considered that he demonstrated developing insight into the importance of safer recruitment and the wider professional standards engaged by his conduct.

However, the panel considered that Mr Furnell had not yet demonstrated full insight into the effect of his conduct on others. In particular, his statement did not adequately address how the pupils might be impacted by his conduct if they learned that a teacher and senior leader responsible for supporting them to obtain qualifications properly had himself falsely represented his qualifications. Nor did he fully consider the potential effect on colleagues, parents or the wider school community, including the damage to trust and confidence in the standards promoted by the school.

The panel therefore concluded that Mr Furnell had demonstrated meaningful but incomplete insight. It gave appropriate weight to the fact that he had not sought to challenge the evidence or minimise the seriousness of the allegations. However, the absence of a fuller consideration of the impact on pupils and others remained a significant concern.

The panel considered the extensive performance management and appraisal evidence produced on behalf of Mr Furnell. The panel exercised caution around those documents which had been completed by a close family member of Mr Furnell. It noted the views of other colleagues and managers who had observed his professional practice independently.

The panel noted the NPQML 360-degree leadership diagnostic dated 14 November 2016 which highlighted positive scoring leadership competencies.

The panel first considered whether it would be proportionate to conclude this case with no recommendation of prohibition, considering whether the publication of the findings made by the panel would be sufficient.

The panel was of the view that, applying the standard of the ordinary intelligent citizen, it would not be a proportionate and appropriate response to recommend no prohibition

order. Recommending that the publication of adverse findings would be sufficient would unacceptably compromise the public interest considerations present in this case, despite the severity of the consequences for Mr Furnell of prohibition.

The panel was of the view that prohibition was both proportionate and appropriate. The panel decided that the public interest considerations outweighed the interests of Mr Furnell. The seriousness of Mr Furnell's dishonesty, together with his incomplete insight into the impact of his conduct on pupils, parents, colleagues and the reputation of the Trust in which he worked, was a significant factor in forming that opinion. Accordingly, the panel made a recommendation to the Secretary of State that a prohibition order should be imposed with immediate effect.

The panel went on to consider whether or not it would be appropriate for it to decide to recommend a review period of the order. The panel was mindful that the Advice states that a prohibition order applies for life, but there may be circumstances, in any given case, that may make it appropriate to allow a teacher to apply to have the prohibition order reviewed after a specified period of time that may not be less than 2 years.

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

None of the listed characteristics were engaged by the panel's findings.

The Advice also indicates that there are certain other types of cases, which includes serious dishonesty, 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.

In reaching this decision, the panel balanced the seriousness of the dishonesty against the evidence of Mr Furnell's contribution to education, particularly his work with vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs. The panel also took account of the independent evidence of his teaching ability, positive relationships with pupils and colleagues, and contribution to school improvement.

The panel recognised that Mr Furnell had demonstrated some meaningful insight, particularly regarding the importance of accurate representations during safer recruitment and the responsibility of senior leaders to uphold professional standards. It also gave weight to the fact that this insight had been expressed before the panel delivered its findings.

However, the panel considered that further time was required for Mr Furnell to develop and evidence a fuller understanding of the impact of his conduct on pupils, colleagues, parents, schools and public confidence in the profession. In particular, he would need to demonstrate an understanding of how pupils might perceive a teacher who encouraged

them to work towards qualifications honestly and validly, while having himself falsely claimed qualifications.

The panel considered that a shorter review period would not provide sufficient time for Mr Furnell to undertake meaningful remediation and relevant professional development and to assemble a reliable portfolio demonstrating sustained insight.

The panel decided that the 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 provisions for a review period after 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 Mr Thomas Furnell should be the subject of a prohibition order, with a review period of five years.

In particular, the panel has found that Mr Furnell 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
 - the rule of law.
- 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 has found that the conduct of Mr Furnell fell significantly short of the standards expected of the profession.

The findings of misconduct are particularly serious as they include repeated incidents of dishonest conduct with the purpose of securing professional and financial advantage for the teacher.

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 Mr Furnell, 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 Mr Furnell's conduct "was in breach of statutory safeguarding provisions and undermined safer recruitment processes." It has also noted that "the safeguarding and wellbeing of pupils/the protection of other members of the public" was one of the public interest considerations set out in the Advice that was relevant in this case. 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. The panel has observed that Mr Furnell had "demonstrated developing insight into the importance of safer recruitment and the wider professional standards engaged by his conduct." However, it has also observed that Mr Furnell "had not yet demonstrated full insight into the effect of his conduct on others", including pupils. The panel therefore concluded that he "had demonstrated meaningful but incomplete insight." In my judgement, the lack of full insight means that there is some risk of repetition of this behaviour, which puts the future safeguarding of pupils at risk. 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:

"The panel considered that public confidence in the profession could be seriously weakened if conduct such as that found against Mr Furnell were not treated with the utmost seriousness when regulating the conduct of the profession. The education system is founded upon the integrity of assessment and the principle that qualifications are obtained through genuine study, effort and achievement. A teacher, particularly a senior leader, falsely claiming qualifications and relying on

falsified documentation for professional and financial gain risks undermining those fundamental principles. A failure to respond appropriately to such conduct could therefore weaken public confidence in the standards upon which the education system is built.”

I am particularly mindful of the finding of repeated dishonest conduct 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 Mr Furnell himself. The panel has commented:

“Although the panel accepted that Mr Furnell had demonstrated good ability as an educator and had made a positive contribution to the School, it did not consider that this evidence established exceptionally high standards of personal and professional conduct or a significant contribution to the education sector more widely.”

The panel has noted that it had received positive written evidence of Mr Furnell’s ability as a teacher and has also noted his “longstanding commitment to working with vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs”.

A prohibition order would prevent Mr Furnell 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 comments concerning the seriousness of Mr Furnell’s dishonesty and his incomplete insight into the impact of his conduct on pupils, parents, colleagues and the school. I have also noted the panel’s findings that there was no evidence that Mr Furnell’s actions were not deliberate or that he was acting under extreme duress. The panel has said:

“The panel considered that Mr Furnell’s conduct represented a serious departure from the Teachers’ Standards because it involved repeated and deliberate dishonesty concerning his qualifications and professional development. He made

false representations about qualifications he had not obtained, provided a falsified university certificate and submitted an incorrect NPQH document containing misrepresented actions at a supposed placement school and a forged signature of its Headteacher.”

I have given less weight in my consideration of sanction therefore to the contribution that Mr Furnell 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, 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 five-year review period.

The panel has noted that the Advice also indicates that in cases involving serious dishonesty the public interest will have greater relevance and weigh in favour of a longer period before a review is considered appropriate.

I have considered the panel’s comments:

“In reaching this decision, the panel balanced the seriousness of the dishonesty against the evidence of Mr Furnell’s contribution to education, particularly his work with vulnerable pupils and those with special educational needs. The panel also took account of the independent evidence of his teaching ability, positive relationships with pupils and colleagues, and contribution to school improvement.

The panel recognised that Mr Furnell had demonstrated some meaningful insight, particularly regarding the importance of accurate representations during safer recruitment and the responsibility of senior leaders to uphold professional standards. It also gave weight to the fact that this insight had been expressed before the panel delivered its findings.

However, the panel considered that further time was required for Mr Furnell to develop and evidence a fuller understanding of the impact of his conduct on pupils, colleagues, parents, schools and public confidence in the profession. In particular, he would need to demonstrate an understanding of how pupils might perceive a teacher who encouraged them to work towards qualifications honestly and validly, while having himself falsely claimed qualifications.

The panel considered that a shorter review period would not provide sufficient time for Mr Furnell to undertake meaningful remediation and relevant professional development and to assemble a reliable portfolio demonstrating sustained insight.”

I have considered whether a five-year review period reflects the seriousness of the findings and is a proportionate period to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. In this case, factors mean that allowing a shorter review period is not sufficient to achieve the aim of maintaining public confidence in the profession. These elements are the serious and repeated nature of the dishonesty, the lack of full insight and the potential damage to the public’s perception of the teaching profession.

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

This means that Mr Thomas Furnell is prohibited from teaching indefinitely and cannot teach in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children’s home in England. He may apply for the prohibition order to be set aside, but not until 7 September 2031, five years from the date of this order at the earliest. This is not an automatic right to have the prohibition order removed. If he does apply, a panel will meet to consider whether the prohibition order should be set aside. Without a successful application, Mr Furnell remains prohibited from teaching indefinitely.

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

Mr Thomas Furnell has a right of appeal to the High Court within 28 days from the date he is given notice of this order.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Oatley', with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

Decision maker: David Oatley

Date: 1 September 2026

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