



National College for
Teaching & Leadership

Ronald Northcott:

Professional Conduct Panel outcome

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

February 2014

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Professional Conduct Panel decision and recommendations, and decision on behalf of the Secretary of State

Teacher: Mr Ronald Northcott

Teacher ref no: 93/38684

Teacher date of birth: 15 November 1947

NCTL Case ref no: 0010327

Date of Determination: 28 February 2014

Former employer: Randstad Education

A. Introduction

A Professional Conduct Panel (“the Panel”) of the National College for Teaching and Leadership (“the National College”) convened on 27 February 2014 at 53-55 Butts Road, Earlsdon Park, Coventry, CV1 3BH to consider the case of Mr Ronald Northcott.

The Panel members were Mrs Mary Speakman (Teacher Panellist - in the Chair), Mr Michael Lesser (Teacher Panellist) and Professor Ian Hughes (Lay Panellist).

The Legal Adviser to the Panel was Mr Paddy Roche of Morgan Cole LLP Solicitors, Oxford.

The Presenting Officer for the National College was Ms Sophie Lister of Kingsley Napley LLP Solicitors, London.

The Teacher Mr Ronald Northcott was not present and was not represented.

The hearing took place in public and was recorded.

B. Allegations

The Panel considered the allegations set out in the Notice of Proceedings dated 17 December 2013.

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

He had published to the internet views that undermined:-

1. Tolerance of and respect for the rights of others;
and
2. Tolerance of and respect for those with different faiths and beliefs.

In his response to the Notice of Proceedings Mr Northcott admitted the allegations. He denied that the facts amounted to unacceptable professional conduct and/or conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

C. Preliminary applications

The Presenting Officer applied for the hearing to proceed in the absence of Mr Northcott. The Application was granted by the Panel. The Panel was satisfied that Mr Northcott did not intend to appear at the hearing as he had so indicated in his response to the Notice of Proceedings Form where he also said that he did not intend to be represented at the hearing.

He further confirmed that he did not propose to attend in a letter to the Presenting Officer's firm received on 21 January 2014. In the circumstances the Panel concluded that his absence was voluntary and he had effectively waived his right to be present.

D. Summary of evidence

Documents

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

Section 1	Chronology	Pages 1 - 2.
Section 2	Notice of Proceedings and Response	Pages 3 - 9.
Section 3	NCTL Witness Statements	Pages 10 -13b.

Section 4 NCTL Documents

Pages 14 - 66.

Section 5 Teacher Documents

Pages 67 - 75.

The Panel Members confirmed that they had read all of the documents in advance of the hearing.

Witnesses

The Panel heard oral evidence from the following witness:-

1. Witness A, Compliance Business Partner with Randstad Education .

E. Decision and reasons

The Panel announced its decision and reasons as follows:

“We have now carefully considered the case before us and reached a decision. We confirm that we have read all the documents provided in the bundle in advance of the hearing.

The case concerns an allegation that whilst registered as a supply teacher with Ranstad Education, Ronald Northcott posted on Twitter numerous derogatory and offensive comments, inter alia, about Scottish people, Catholics, Muslims and immigrants both on an account which was “protected” but apparently accessed by many “followers” and a further account accessible to the general public which was not protected in any way. Some of the comments posted contained abusive phrases and descriptions.

At the time of posting some of the comments Mr Northcott was actually employed as a supply teacher at a Catholic College and his conduct led to a number of parents contacting the College. As a consequence the agency decided to terminate his registration.

Mr Northcott admits posting the comments but submits that these disciplinary proceedings are brought about “by politics and not education.” He says that what he has tweeted and discussed is “fact and not malicious.” He says also that no personal, political or religious beliefs have ever been imparted in any classroom.

Findings of Fact

Our findings of fact are as follows:

We have found the following particulars of the allegations against Mr Ronald Northcott proven for these reasons:-

1. That he published to the internet views that undermined:-

1. Tolerance of and respect for the rights of others;

and

2. Tolerance of and respect for those with different faiths and beliefs.

Our reasons are that Mr Northcott has admitted the particulars and we have seen the various posts published to the Internet, newspaper articles arising therefrom and screenshots of various blogs referring to the Twitter posts exhibited in the case papers.

Findings as to Unacceptable Professional Conduct and/or Conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute

We recognise that the conduct complained of in this case occurred outside the immediate school environment and Mr Northcott observes in his letter at p73 that “no personal or religious beliefs have ever been imparted in the classroom.” We have therefore considered firstly whether this is a case of conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

In accordance with the applicable definition we are required to judge whether this case exposes misconduct of a serious nature, falling significantly short of the standard of behaviour expected of a teacher.

Our guidance from the Department of Education also indicates that “allegations of misconduct that took place outside of the school environment may be considered to be relevant if they are serious and the behaviour is directly related to an individual’s suitability to be a teacher and, if proven, may bring the profession into disrepute. Panel members should use their knowledge to take into account how the teaching profession is viewed by others, and the influence that teachers may have on pupils, parents and others in the community. Pupils must be able to view teachers as role models.”

We also have considered the application of the Personal and Professional Conduct part of the Teachers’ Standards. Those standards include the following:-

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

- showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others

- not undermining fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs

The standards also require teachers to have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach.

We have judged the conduct of Mr Northcott against the guidance and the relevant standards we have identified. We have very carefully considered the nature of the Twitter posts for which he has accepted responsibility. We find many of the views expressed to be in conflict with fundamental British values. Much of the language is inflammatory and abusive. Many of the posts express intolerant attitudes to ethnicity, religious beliefs and nationalities. They totally offend against the standards to which teachers should have regard.

Mr Northcott's views received wide local coverage and criticism both in a prominent local newspaper and in various blogs published on the Internet. His offensive opinions therefore must have reached a wider audience than just those persons who had simply accessed directly his Twitter accounts. He advertised on his Twitter account the fact that he was a Secondary School Teacher (p44) and in one of his posts (p65) even named the school where he was then employed. Comments posted by other persons which we have seen (at p16 and p24) variously express concern that Mr Northcott should "hold a position of influence where children are involved" and express worries that "he is a teacher". The College which employed him received a substantial number of complaints from parents of pupils who were concerned by his inappropriate activities. The Local Authority also expressed concerns to the Agency by whom he was employed which then dispensed with his services.

It appears to the Panel that for a period his activities became quite high profile. We therefore have no doubt that this is a case of conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute.

We have also considered whether this is a case of unacceptable professional conduct. We judge that the risk of damage to any pupils who may have been exposed to Mr Northcott's views in relation to many religions, people and nations was significant despite his assertion that no personal, political or religious beliefs have ever been imparted in any classroom. It is clear from this case that his opinions became widely available on the Internet and through the media. In the words of the guidance referred to above, misconduct outside of the education setting will only amount to unacceptable professional conduct if it affects the way the person fulfils their teaching role or "if it may lead to pupils being exposed to or influenced by the behaviour in a harmful way."

We recognise that pupils must be able to view teachers as role models in the way they behave. We believe that there was a potential but substantial risk to pupils being harmed by exposure to Mr Northcott's views which cannot be ignored and was very real – particularly in a teacher respected by his pupils. Thus we judge that unacceptable professional conduct in this case is also established."

Panel's recommendation to the Secretary of State

We consider that the evidence in this case involves the following features :-

- serious departure from the personal and professional conduct elements of the Teachers Standards
- actions or behaviours that undermine fundamental British values, democracy and law, promote political and/or religious extremism, or demonstrate deliberate intolerance and/or lack of respect of the rights, faith and beliefs of others
- deep seated attitude that leads to harmful behaviour

Mr Northcott's actions were deliberate. He was not acting under duress. We have assumed, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, that he has a previously good history. We acknowledge that Prohibition Orders are made in the public interest which includes the maintenance of public confidence in the profession, declaring and upholding proper standards of conduct and the protection of pupils and other members of the public. We also recognise that Prohibition Orders should be proportionate.

We conclude that the serious features we have identified in this case render Mr Northcott incompatible with continuing to practise as a teacher. We are particularly concerned that the number and spread of the inappropriate views he has published suggest that he has a deep seated attitude which is also exposed by his failure to acknowledge that his admitted conduct was unacceptable.

We therefore recommend that a Prohibition Order is imposed in this case but with a period of 5 years imposed before a Set Aside application can be made by Mr Northcott.

That period recognises that Mr Northcott has a previous good history and takes account of his age. We believe that such an outcome would be a proportionate disposal.

Decision and reasons on behalf of the Secretary of State

I have carefully considered the findings and recommendations of the Panel in this case.

The Panel have found the allegations proven and judged that those facts amount to unacceptable professional conduct and conduct that may bring the profession into disrepute. His behaviour evidences a serious departure from the personal and professional elements of the Teachers' Standards, specifically

- Showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others; and

- not undermining fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

The Panel have concluded that Mr Northcott's behaviour was deliberate and that he wasn't acting under duress. He has failed to recognise his behaviour as being unacceptable and the volume and spread of his inappropriate views indicate a deep seated attitude. I agree that a prohibition order is an appropriate and proportionate sanction.

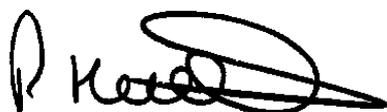
I have given particular consideration to the Panel's recommendation as to a review period. The panel have recommended that Mr Northcott be allowed to apply for the order to be set aside after a period of 5 years has elapsed based upon his previous good history and age. I have considered their recommendation together with the advice contained in the advice document 'Teacher misconduct: the prohibition of teachers'. Mr Northcott has evidenced a deep seated attitude, lack of insight and wide ranging intolerance and I have decided, taking account of the public interest, that it is both appropriate and proportionate that the order should be without opportunity for review.

This means that Mr Ronald Northcott is prohibited from teaching indefinitely and cannot teach in any school, sixth form college, relevant youth accommodation or children's home in England. Furthermore, in view of the seriousness of the allegations found proved against him, I have decided that Mr Ronald Northcott shall not be entitled to apply for restoration of his eligibility to teach.

This Order takes effect from the date on which it is served on the Teacher.

Mr Ronald Northcott has a right of appeal to the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court within 28 days from the date he is given notice of this Order.

NAME OF DECISION MAKER: Paul Heathcote

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P Heathcote', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Date: 3 March 2014

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