

Sussex college fined £50,000 for slurry pollution

Plumpton College was today fined £50,000 and ordered to pay costs of almost £45,000 at Hove Crown court.

The Environment Agency prosecuted the agricultural college for causing the deaths of more than 1,500 fish, after management failings caused slurry to significantly pollute a nearby stream.

Judge Shani Barnes said the Environment Agency had worked tirelessly to bring the college into regulatory compliance over the past few years.

The court heard on 29 and 30 November 2016, contaminated water containing a high amount of cow slurry was spread as fertiliser onto a field known as 15 Acres, at Wales Farm, now known as Lambert Farm, managed by Plumpton College.

This work was carried out by head herdsman Stuart Duncan, despite the volume spread being many times more than the field could absorb. As the ground was also frozen, much of the contaminated water ran off into ditches and land drains, which then flowed into the nearby Plumpton Mill Stream.

The pollution was classified as a Category 1 incident by the Environment Agency – its most serious level. The stream smelled strongly of slurry, and the watercourse was visibly brown with foam on the top. Many of the dead fish were protected species, such as migratory trout.

The Environment Agency became aware of the incident after it was reported by a member of the public. The college did not report the pollution had occurred, and nor did it have an emergency plan in place for dealing with slurry spillage.

The agency has been in regular contact to advise the college on its management and operations on number occasions since 2011, because of concerns about incidents and non-compliances with agricultural regulations.

The college admitted the incident was the result of a mistake by a member of staff. They admitted that the actions taken to spread the slurry were wrong, as the weather conditions and field were not suitable for this to take place.

Prior to sentencing, Duncan accepted a formal caution for his actions contributing to the incident.

Ed Schmidt, environment management team leader in Sussex for the Environment Agency, said:

Poor management, a lack of contingency planning and inadequate infrastructure at the farm resulted in a totally avoidable pollution incident that had a disastrous effect on the local

environment.

It is even more disappointing that a college that specialises in agricultural practices and teaches farmers of the future failed to take all reasonable actions, and was wholly negligent in preventing this incident from occurring in the first place.

The outcome of this case should be a clear and strong message to all people working within the farming industry to ensure they think about the actions they take when managing highly polluting liquids.

Ensure you are compliant with codes of practice, take the time to review your procedures. Consider seeking advice from the Environment Agency or qualified consultants. Also check and maintain your infrastructure and test your emergency planning and response to accidental incidents.

Plumpton College, of Ditchling Road, Lewes, pleaded guilty at Lewes Crown court to the offence at an earlier hearing. Costs of £44,852.66 against the college were awarded.

Note to editors:

Plumpton College was prosecuted under Regulations 12(1) (b) and 38(1) (a) of the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010.

[Government working with midwives, medical experts, and academics to investigate BAME maternal mortality](#)

- Maternal mortality now occurs in fewer than 1 in 10,000 pregnancies, but the disparity between Black women and White women has widened
- Government brings together frontline midwives, medical experts, and health academics to ensure every mother has access to a safe, special birth
- Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch, says: "Whoever you are and wherever you live, the birth of a child should be a wonderful, momentous time"

The Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch, will today [2 September] lead a discussion between frontline midwives, medical experts, academics, and regional health representatives to tackle Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) maternal mortality.

The NHS is the safest place in the world to have a baby and giving birth is

now safer than it was 10 years ago. Since 2010, despite increases in certain risk factors, outcomes for mothers and babies have improved:

- Stillbirths are down 21%, reaching the 20% fall target two years early
- Perinatal mortality is down 15%
- Maternal mortality is down 14%.

Tragic maternal deaths now occur in fewer than 1 in 10,000 pregnancies. 209 mothers died in the UK from pregnancy-related causes from 2015 to 2017. During this period more than 2.2 million women gave birth in the UK.

Evidence points to a concerning disparity in maternal mortality between Black women and White women. Black British mothers are five times more likely to die in pregnancy or six weeks after childbirth, than White women. Women of mixed ethnicity have three times the risk, and Asian women almost twice the risk. BAME women are also at an increased risk of having a pre-term birth, stillbirth, neonatal death or a baby born with low birth weight.

Government is committed to tackling these concerning statistics. That's why we have set up a new model of community hubs, which bring a range of perinatal and sometimes intrapartum care services together in one setting closer to women's homes to identify potential problems sooner. They have been opened across the country, with over 100 new hubs open as of December 2019.

This is part of our aim to half stillbirths, maternal mortality, neonatal mortality and serious brain injury by 2025. Recommendations from the landmark [National Maternity Review: Better Births](#) are being implemented through Local Maternity Systems – bringing together the NHS, local authorities and other local partners to ensure mother and baby receive seamless care.

This roundtable will assemble experts to understand exactly what more can be done to ensure every mother and baby receives the best and safest maternity care.

Minister for Equalities Kemi Badenoch said:

“The government takes the issue of maternal mortality very seriously. We have brought the numbers down significantly and want mothers and children of all backgrounds to know we continue to do more. Not just closing the disparity in risk between mothers of different ethnicities, but working together to ultimately end maternal mortality for good.

“Whoever you are and wherever you live, the birth of a child should be a wonderful, momentous time for a mother and her family.

“Today I am meeting academics, health experts, midwives on the ground, and regional health leaders, so we can work together to protect women and their children.”

Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health

Nadine Dorries said:

“It’s completely unacceptable for women to experience greater risk of poor outcomes during their pregnancy, or after giving birth because of the colour of their skin.

“I am determined to work with the NHS to tackle health inequalities and make sure BAME women receive high quality care.

“We recently launched a £3.3 million Health and Wellbeing Fund as part of our ongoing work to improve outcomes for mothers and young children in deprived areas or from BAME backgrounds.

“Today’s discussion will be crucial in making sure we go even further to ensure mothers and babies from ethnic minority backgrounds get the care they deserve.”

Alongside the discussion today, three expert academics will also present on the existing research base and what solid evidence exists, including findings on disparities in maternal health outcomes beyond mortality statistics.

Actions have already been put in place as part of the [NHS Long Term Plan](#), which aims to achieve 50% reductions in stillbirth, maternal mortality, neonatal mortality and serious brain injury by 2025. These include:

- implementing a new carer model which will see 75% of women from BAME communities receiving continuity of care from their midwife throughout pregnancy, labour and the postnatal period
- programmes supporting mental health for mothers, including care provided by specialist perinatal mental health services, which will be available from preconception to 24 months after birth
- a [Perinatal Mortality Review Tool](#), which is now used by all maternity providers, supporting high quality reviews of the circumstances and care leading up to stillbirth and neonatal death.

Notes to editors

List of attendees:

- Minister Nadine Dorries, Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health – Department of Health and Social Care
- Professor Jacqueline Dunkley-Bent – England’s Chief Midwifery Officer, Professor of Midwifery at King’s College London and London South Bank University
- Professor Marian Knight – Professor of Maternal and Child Population Health at the Nuffield Department of Public Health at the University of Oxford. Leads the MBRRACE-UK national confidential enquiries into maternal morbidity and mortality.
- Dr Jenny Douglas – Senior Lecturer in Health Promotion at the Open University, Chair and Founder of the Black Women’s Health and Wellbeing Research Network
- Dr Christine Ekechi – Clinician, Academic and Consultant Obstetrician

and Gynaecologist at Imperial College London.

- Hannah Lynes – Acting Chair of Maternity Voices Partnership, NHS England
- Sandra Guise – Chair West Cumbria Maternity Voices Partnership (MVP); Chair Carlisle & Eden MVP; Co-chair Northeast & North Cumbria Clinical Network Maternity Engagement Group
- Dr Edward Morris – President of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
- Stephen Hall – Special Adviser to the President, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
- Dr David Churchill – Professor of Obstetrics, Honorary Research Fellow – National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit, University of Oxford
- Janet Fyle – Registered midwife, nurse and Policy Advisor at Royal College of Midwives
- Wendy Olayiwola – Senior midwife and continuity of carer lead, Barts Health
- Daghni Rajasingam – Consultant obstetrician with a specialist interest in high risk maternal care, Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital
- Rt. Hon. Professor Lord Ajay Kakkar – Professor of Surgery, University College London
- Aliya Fazil – Service User Co-Chair, Bradford MVP

Written statement from Chair of Ofqual to the Education Select Committee

On behalf of my Board, I welcome the opportunity to give evidence to the Select Committee and provide, by way of a written statement, some introductory comments.

Above all else, we want to make clear that we are sorry for what happened this summer: the distress and anxiety it has caused for many students and their parents; the problems it has created for teachers; and the impact it has had on higher and further education providers.

In March, Ofqual was consulted by the Secretary of State on how to manage school qualifications in the context of a pandemic. Our advice at that time was that the best option in terms of valid qualifications would be to hold exams in a socially distanced manner. We also set out alternative options including the use of standardised teacher assessments and the risks associated with them.

On March 18, the Secretary of State for Education took the decision to cancel exams this summer. The loss of schooling and the likely parental concerns about sending children back into schools to take exams meant that exams were not considered a viable option.

We were asked to implement a system of grading using standardised teacher

assessments, and directed to ensure that any model did not lead to excessive grade inflation compared with last year's results. The primary objective was to allow young people to progress with their lives, whether to sixth form, college, university, work or training. Given that they could not demonstrate their abilities in summer exams, our approach was supplemented by an opportunity to sit exams in the autumn.

The principle of moderating teacher grades was accepted as a sound one, and indeed the relevant regulatory and examination bodies across the four nations of the United Kingdom separately put in place plans to do this. All the evidence shows that teachers vary considerably in the generosity of their grading – as every school pupil knows. Also, using teacher assessment alone might exacerbate socio-economic disadvantage. Using statistics to iron out these differences and ensure consistency looked, in principle, to be a good idea. That is why in our consultations and stakeholder discussions all the teaching unions supported the approach we adopted. Indeed when we consulted on it, 89% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with our proposed aims for the statistical standardisation approach.

We knew, however, that there would be specific issues associated with this approach. In particular, statistical standardisation of this kind will inevitably result in a very small proportion of quite anomalous results that would need to be corrected by applying human judgment through an appeals process.

For example, we were concerned about bright students in historically low attaining schools. We identified that approximately 0.2% of young peoples' grades were affected by this but that it was not possible to determine in advance which cases warranted a change to grades. That is why the appeals process we designed and refined was so important. But we recognise that young people receiving these results experienced significant distress and that this caused people to question the process.

The statistical standardisation process was not biased – we did the analyses to check and found there was no widening of the attainment gap. We have published this analysis. Indeed, 'A' and 'A*' grade students in more disadvantaged areas did relatively better with standardised results than when results were not standardised.

However, the impossibility of standardising very small classes meant that some subjects and some centres could not be standardised, and so saw higher grades on average than would have been expected if it had been possible to standardise their results. This benefitted smaller schools and disadvantaged larger schools and colleges. It affected private schools in particular, as well as some smaller maintained schools and colleges, special schools, pupil referral units, hospital schools and similar institutions. We knew about this, but were unable to find a solution to this problem. However, we still regarded standardisation as preferable because overall it reduced the relative advantage of private schools compared to others.

Ultimately, however, the approach failed to win public confidence, even in circumstances where it was operating exactly as we had intended it to. While

sound in principle, candidates who had reasonable expectations of achieving a grade were not willing to accept that they had been selected on the basis of teacher rankings and statistical predictions to receive a lower grade. To be told that you cannot progress as you wanted because you have been awarded a lower grade in this way was unacceptable and so the approach had to be withdrawn. We apologise for this. It caused distress to young people, problems for teachers, disrupted university admissions and left young people with qualifications in which confidence has been shaken. It will affect those taking qualifications next year who are competing for the same opportunities as those who received this year's grades.

We fully accept our share of responsibility in this. Throughout the whole period we worked in close partnership and transparently with the Department for Education. We also consulted widely including with exam boards and with relevant education unions to ensure the proposals had their support.

There has been much discussion about the design of the algorithm. Many designs were considered and many proposals put forward. The suggestion has been made that a different model might have led to a different outcome. But the evidence from this summer, including from similar models implemented and withdrawn in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland indicates a much more fundamental problem. With hindsight it appears unlikely that we could ever have delivered this policy successfully.

What became apparent in the days after issuing A level results was that neither the equalities analyses, nor the prospect of appeals, nor the opportunity to take exams in the autumn, could make up for the feeling of unfairness that a student had when given a grade other than what they and their teachers believed they were capable of, without having had the chance to sit the exam.

Understandably, there is now a desire to attribute blame. The decision to use a system of statistical standardised teacher assessments was taken by the Secretary of State and issued as a direction to Ofqual. Ofqual could have rejected this, but we decided that this was in the best interests of students, so that they could progress to their next stage of education, training or work.

The implementation of that approach was entirely down to Ofqual. However, given the exceptional nature of this year, we worked in a much more collaborative way than we would in a normal year, sharing detailed information with partners.

We kept the Department for Education fully informed about the work we were doing and the approach we intended to take to qualifications, the risks and impact on results as they emerged. However, we are ultimately responsible for the decisions that fall to us as the regulator.

We believe it is important that we do not leap to inaccurate conclusions prematurely. It will take time to fully understand everything that happened here, less than three weeks after results day. But there are already some important lessons to be learned from this summer:

- any awarding process that does not give the individual the ability to affect their fate by demonstrating their skills and knowledge in a fair test will not command and retain public confidence
- the original policy was adopted on the basis that the autumn series would give young people who were disappointed with their results, the opportunity to sit an examination. However, the extended lockdown of schools and the failure to ensure that such candidates could still take their places at university meant that this option was, for many, effectively removed. This significantly shifted the public acceptability of awarding standardised grades
- it is easy for people to believe that a policy is fair at the overall level, but this belief changes very quickly when the impact is felt at an individual level. It is not clear to us that a more effective communications effort would have overcome this, but to be successful it would have to have engaged multiple levels of communication, not simply the activities of the regulator
- a 'better' algorithm would not have made the outcomes significantly more acceptable. The inherent limitations of the data and the nature of the process were what made it unacceptable

The blame lies with us collectively – all of us who failed to design a mechanism for awarding grades that was acceptable to the public and met the Secretary of State's policy intent of ensuring grades were awarded in a way consistent with the previous year.

To try to deliver comparable qualification results in the absence of students having taken any assessments (examinations) proved to be an impossible task. It is now our collective responsibility to learn the lessons and to establish a way forward that can command public confidence and give students what they need to progress, even in difficult circumstances.

Roger Taylor

Chair, Ofqual Board

[The UK and Thai SEC sign MOU to promote inclusive economic growth](#)

Today the UK Government and the Thailand's Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish a financial

services partnership. The collaboration aims to support sustainable, inclusive, low carbon economic growth and recovery in Thailand through the financial services sector.

The MoU strengthens the existing relationship between the UK and the SEC, formalising collaboration in areas including accounting standards; the development of Financial Technology (FinTech) to facilitate greater access to finance and business opportunity for Thai FinTech industry; and sustainable finance such as promoting green bonds and climate risk disclosure for listed companies. Initially, specific areas of focus will include green bonds, the fintech ecosystem, e-Know Your Customer, and cybersecurity.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Ms. Ruenvadee Suwanmongkol, SEC Secretary General said:

This MoU reiterates the SEC Thailand's dedication and extensive efforts with respect to the strategic plan on digital technology and sustainable capital market. It has indeed come at a crucial time amidst the COVID-19 pandemic as this crisis has not only been an accelerating factor for innovation and digitalization of market participants to cope with its impact but has also emphasized on the importance of being adaptive and flexible to new opportunities arising from the change in behaviours of market players in the capital market. The SEC Thailand firmly believes that this MoU will support the enhancement of Thai ecosystem for transformation into digital economy and sustainable growth

H.E. Brian Davidson, the British Ambassador to Thailand said: > Financial services and, in particular, fintech, have played a critical role in supporting businesses and individuals through the Covid-19 pandemic. Now financial services have an equally important role to play as we recover – fostering a new, better, greener, more inclusive economy. I'm delighted, therefore, that we are today formalising our broad-based collaboration with the SEC. >

About the ASEAN Low Carbon Energy Programme

The ASEAN Low Carbon Energy Programme is funded by the UK's Overseas Development Assistance budget under the UK Government's Prosperity Fund. The programme seeks to support ASEAN countries to transition to low carbon societies and realise economic and wider benefits as a result. The programme runs from 2019 to 2022.

About the ASEAN Economic Reform Programme

The ASEAN Economic Reform Programme is funded by the UK's Overseas Development Assistance budget under the UK Government's Prosperity Fund

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[Academy online seminar: The market for illicit drugs](#)

News story

Dame Caroline Black has now completed Phase I of her Independent Drugs review and in this free seminar she will discuss her initial findings,



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