

BETWEEN:

BETTY KNIGHT

Claimant

and

HSDC (ALTON)

Respondent

WITNESS STATEMENT OF

[REDACTED]

I, [REDACTED] husband of Betty Knight, of [REDACTED] Alton will say as follows:

1. When Betty and I came to England in 1998, she was already an overseas qualified and practising teacher of English.
2. I started work as a A-Level Design teacher at Alton College in August 1998, whilst Betty completed an English degree and subsequently an English Master's degree at Winchester University.
3. Betty then began work as a Special Educational Needs (SEN) personal tutor and subject teacher (English, Drama and Creative Writing) at Treloar Specialist FE College, where

she taught for another six years. During this employment she worked with students to publish four anthologies of students' stories and poems and also begun the writing of her own two self-published crime fiction novels.

4. Betty started teaching at Alton College in 2013, where I believe she was an 'outstanding' teacher and her documented: lesson observations, appraisals and examination results, all support this view. When she taught Design and Engineering students, that I also taught and tutored, she always made a huge difference to their mindset and ultimately their success. I can particularly remember two students (that I also taught) that she freely tutored at college, in her own time, even though she wasn't their English teacher:

- [REDACTED] shocked himself and his mother by getting a 5/B- grade (see page 553).
- [REDACTED] was very appreciate of Betty's efforts to help him get a 5/B- grade (see pages 496-7).

I also remember Betty telling me about a mixed-race student that she taught, who had failed English four times previously, who achieved an A grade!

5. From our discussions about teaching and learning styles, I would say two things were absolutely fundamental to her success as a teacher. Firstly, spending time getting to know a student and building a positive relationship – this often seemed to consume all her break/lunch times! Secondly, being 'firm but fair' with students – one phrase comes to mind "with rights come responsibilities".
6. I witnessed how much of her own time, at home, she spent on creating and adapting relevant and engaging teaching and learning resources. She also spent a not inconsiderable time telephoning parents to ensure she was aware of any circumstances, character traits or background that could influence their route to success.
7. Being the only 'black' teacher at Alton College, in Hampshire, Betty was conscious of how most staff and students will have never worked with a black teacher before. She was keen to ensure her positivity, engagement and attainments would not only reflect on her, but also help staff and students avoid negatively stereotyping black people.

8. Throughout the years 2013-2017, Betty remained on a variable hour's contract, much to her frustration and to the detriment of our ability to make long term financial commitments. Within the Engineering department, I am aware of three white members of staff who were all given permanent teaching contracts, yet were **not** qualified teachers (Qualified Teacher Status – QTS):

- [REDACTED] (QTS never achieved) – Parent of student at college, given a permanent teaching contract within a year of teaching at college (2018).
- [REDACTED] (Masters, QTS never achieved) – Learning Support Assistant given a permanent teaching contract prior to teaching at college (2018).
- [REDACTED] (No HE, QTS never achieved) – [REDACTED] given an HSDC permanent teaching contract within a year of teaching at college (2019).

9. Prior to the start of term in September 2017, Betty came home to tell me her teaching hours had been taken from her timetable at short notice, leaving her with just one GCSE English class to teach. Betty was 'very upset' and so, dissatisfied with [REDACTED] lack of response and Nicola's explanation, on Tuesday 12th September I met with [REDACTED] to discuss our concerns (Betty had almost given up hope of receiving fair treatment). The meeting was not arranged as [REDACTED] invited me back to her office, after I spoke to her following a staff briefing event.

10. In the meeting, where I was quite emotional, I spoke about how my wife's treatment seemed unfair and how she was very upset with how the college was treating her compared to existing and newly employed staff. [REDACTED] stated that Stephanie Richardson, as Head of Department for English, would assess her own department's staffing needs and if she felt the department would be understaffed, in the near future, then she would request Human Resources to prepare a job advert. We also discussed the nature of teaching contracts and why Betty was still on a 'temporary' contract after four years and yet two newly employed 'white' staff had joined the college with guaranteed hours (permanent contracts). She advised me to speak to Jon Myers (then Vice Principal) and would arrange a meeting (see emails dated 12th and 13th September 2017 on page 471).

11. [REDACTED] was quite concerned with how this matter was also affecting me (I was the one who had originally encouraged Betty to work at Alton College) and she voiced her concerns about my welfare to my then line manager, [REDACTED]
12. I met with Jon Myers on Friday 15th September 2017 at 11am (see page 473), but Betty was too emotional to attend this meeting. In the meeting I described to Jon how disheartened she was with her treatment within the college. I highlighted that Betty was a highly qualified teacher with a proven track record, who had worked at the college for over four years. Yet she was still on a variable hours' contract and had now just been given a significantly reduced timetable with no opportunities to secure or develop her teaching career. I explained that she felt she was being discriminated against because staff had been employed, without her knowledge, to take up positions that now required them to teach most of Betty's hours, to fulfil their contracts. I then asked Jon if he personally knew of any teachers at college, with an MA and a teaching qualification, who are still on a variable hour's contract? Jon wasn't able to answer but was disappointed that Betty couldn't voice her own concerns – he encouraged me to get Betty to come to a meeting so matters could try to be resolved.
13. Betty and I met with Jon Myers on Monday 18th September 2017 at 4pm (see pages 473 & 474). In this meeting we had a frank discussion about different forms of discrimination [REDACTED] I made the point that sexual orientation and race can both be discriminated against. But whilst sexual orientation can be disguised or hidden, if desired, Betty's skin colour cannot be disguised or hidden. Therefore, if as it seems, she is being unfairly treated compared to other members of the English department (although she is very able, experienced and well qualified) could her 'blackness' be the reason she is being discriminated against – if not what else is the reason? We made it clear to Jon that we believed that racial discrimination was at the root of the negative treatment to which Betty had been subjected. I explained that we didn't want to take legal action against the college but we would if she was not treated fairly and equally to her 'white' colleagues.
14. Jon asked Betty what she felt would improve matters and she requested a 0.5 (50% Full Time Equivalent, FTE) permanent contract, a desire to be involved in some A Level

teaching as part of career progression, and a willingness to join the Equality and Diversity Committee (chaired by Peter Cox – previous Quality Manager). The meeting was concluded with Jon stating that since term had started it would be difficult to reallocate classes but he would explore opportunities and get back to Betty.

15. The outcomes from this meeting were that Betty was given a 0.3 FTE permanent contract (see page 475-6), the opportunity to teach an A Level English module for half a term (see page 477) and she was invited to join the E&D committee.
16. As a consequence of her work in the E&D committee, she took an active voluntary role in the annual whole year group presentation of ‘Black History month’ - from which a mixed-race girl returned to my class stating “... wow I feel proud to be black”.
17. After her joint lesson observation in December 2019, Betty was very distraught and nearly crashed her car after getting feedback from Claire Scott. The day after the lesson observation Betty drafted a letter to Claire to highlight the unfairness and contest the outcome.
18. The following weeks and months were the most difficult for Betty and our family. She continued to teach most of her lessons towards the end of term - whilst communicating her concerns and contesting the outcome, but to no avail.
19. Matters came to a head when, at home, Betty tried to write an email response to Stephanie (see page 250-1). I heard her scream and came downstairs to find her hyperventilating and very distraught, she was quite overwhelmed and left the house, on that wet evening, without her shoes on – I went after her fearing she might harm herself, or worse. I later helped her by completing her email – I checked that she was in agreement with what I typed before sending the response. She had reached the point of ‘no return’ (page 394-5) and was signed off after this, and has never taught or tutored since.
20. Betty and I met with a senior solicitor from Morrisons, in January 2020. She listened to Betty’s concerns and her advice was to try to raise a second formal grievance (her first grievance had been ignored by Claire). She also advised Betty to contact ACAS, due to time limits, regarding a potential action that might be taken against the college.

21. HSDC were forced to undertake an internal investigation but, both Betty and I felt the investigation was lacking in both range and depth, and the findings were provided to support the respondent's original decision. Therefore, given we both felt she had been 'targeted' we were left with no option but to pursue an employment tribunal claim.

22. Betty's mental health and well-being were greatly damaged by this time and she sought to express her feelings through writing poetry and reading about black history and experiences. She was at least not now indicating she would harm herself but she said she was 'burying her thoughts so as not to upset us'. Some things couldn't be hidden though:

- rarely leaving the house – anxiety attacks and subsequently prescribed inhalers to help alleviate asthma brought on by anxiety.
- consuming alcohol and going to bed at 2-3am – every night!
- arising in the afternoon with a midday alarm.
- prescribed pain killers and anti-depressants.
- mood swings and not wanting to be left alone in the house.
- forgetfulness and exhaustion.
- intensely passionate speeches/rants.
- comments and actions characterising depression.
- very early morning car drives.
- talk of escaping or leaving the UK.
- paranoia – meeting SR, CS, NK or people resembling them!
- avoiding socialising and declining invites to meet by ex-colleagues.
- using loud music, or headphones, to drown out negative thoughts.

23. She is not the same confident and positive person she was and I often regret encouraging her to work at Alton College, and perhaps even coming back to this country; from Botswana.

Further points:

24. In early 2020, I was requested by Stephanie Richardson to teach the very same group of GCSE English students that Betty had been jointly observed teaching. This was a

somewhat bizarre situation and felt slightly uncomfortable for me. I found the group of students to be quite respectful and other than one student, who had chosen to work elsewhere since Betty was not now teaching them, generally attentive and certainly not (as Claire stated in her investigation interview page 277) ‘w(o)andering in and out of the lesson to use the toilet.’

25. Recently, Betty showed me an email (dated March 2018) where a parent had been ‘requested’ to put their daughter’s concerns in writing (see page 193). In my experience, concerns by a student or parent (of a similar nature) could be put in writing, particularly if complex, but whether verbalised or written the objective of the person receiving the concerns, would be to swiftly inform all relevant parties, so an effective plan of action can be agreed and then communicated to the complainant.
26. Claire Scott (Teaching Learning and Quality Manager from 2019) left HSDC in September 2020.
27. Following a management restructure, Jon Myers ceased employment with HSDC (Alton) in February 2021.
28. Following a management restructure, Stephanie Richardson ceased employment with HSDC (Alton) in June 2021.

I confirm that the contents of my statement are true.

Signed: 

Dated: *9th November 2021*