

**Hearing part-held in private****Professional Conduct Committee  
Initial Hearing****24-26 March 2025**

**Name:** SWEETMAN, Laura

**Registration number:** 127671

**Case number:** CAS-207850-F3V5T3

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**General Dental Council:** Natalie Bird of counsel  
Instructed by Holly Watt of IHLPS

**Registrant:** Present  
Represented by Stephen Burns, a friend

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**Fitness to practise:** Impaired by reason of Misconduct and Conviction

**Outcome:** Suspension (with a review)

**Duration:** 4 months

**Immediate order:** No immediate order

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**Committee members:** Zareen Elleby (DCP) (Chair)  
Juliette Brouard (Dentist)  
Catherine Pease (Lay)

**Legal adviser:** Judith Walker

**Committee Secretary:** Paul Carson

### **CHARGE**

Laura SWEETMAN, a dental nurse, National Certificate NEBDN 2002, was summoned to appear before the Professional Conduct Committee on 24 March 2025 for an inquiry into the following charge:

“That being registered as a dental care professional:

1. On 11 July 2023, you were convicted at Chester Magistrates’ Court of driving a motor vehicle with excess alcohol on 16 June 2023, contrary to section 5(1)(a) of the Road Traffic Act 1988.
2. You failed to inform the General Dental Council immediately that, on or around 16 June 2023, you had been charged with driving a motor vehicle with excess alcohol.
3. Your actions in relation to allegation 2 were:
  - a. Misleading, and/or
  - b. Dishonest.

AND that by reason of the facts alleged, your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of conviction and/or misconduct”

**At this hearing the Committee made a determination that includes some private information. That information shall be omitted from any public version of this determination and the document marked to show where private material is removed.**

Miss Sweetman,

1. This case concerns a conviction you received on 11 July 2023 for driving a motor vehicle with excess alcohol and your failure to have immediately informed the General Dental Council (GDC) that you had been charged with this offence, such that your conduct is alleged to have been misleading and dishonest.
2. You admitted the fact of your conviction and that you had failed to immediately inform the GDC that you had been charged. You denied that your conduct was misleading or dishonest.
3. The Police and court records relating to your conviction were before the Committee, including witness statements from the arresting officers. The Committee also received an uncontested witness statement dated 12 September 2024 from Mr B. Nolan, a caseworker at the GDC who simply produced records relating to your GDC registration. The Committee heard oral evidence from you and from Dentist A, with whom you work and to whom you had discussed your conviction before reporting it to the GDC.
4. The Committee heard part of your evidence in private in accordance with Rule 54 of the General Dental Council (Fitness to Practise) Rules 2006 (the 'Rules') in order to protect your right to a private and family life.
5. The Committee heard the submissions made on behalf of the GDC by Ms Bird, and those made on your behalf by Mr Burns.
6. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser.
7. The burden is on the GDC to prove each allegation on the balance of probabilities.

*Findings 25 March 2025*

8. In the evening of 16 June 2023 your car was stopped by the Police due to the manner of your driving. The Police observed that you smelled of alcohol, had slightly slurred speech and struggled to spell your surname. Although you denied having consumed alcohol, a roadside breath test was administered which indicated that you were over the prescribed limit of alcohol. You were arrested and breath test procedures performed whilst you were in custody detected 99 microgrammes of alcohol in 100 millilitres of breath, which was almost three times the legal limit. The Police notes of the testing procedure record that you initially '*Stated must have been spiked when provided results*'. You admitted to the Committee that you had initially dishonestly suggested to the Police that your drink had been spiked in an attempt to avoid blame for drink-driving.
9. On 17 June 2023 you were charged with driving a motor vehicle with excess alcohol.

10. On 11 July 2023, you were convicted on your guilty plea at Chester Magistrates' Court of driving a motor vehicle with excess alcohol on 16 June 2023, contrary to section 5(1)(a) of the Road Traffic Act 1988. You were sentenced to 80 hours of unpaid work and disqualified from driving for 24 months.
11. At some time in August 2023, you informed Dentist A and your employers of your conviction. They both advised you that you would need to inform the GDC, which you then did by email on 14 August 2023, in which you stated:

*'...I am writing to you today to inform you that on the 110723 I was convicted of drink driving out of work hours on the weekend, I understand that I have an obligation to inform you of this criminal offence. I have made my employer aware of my conviction and would like you to inform me as to the next steps regarding my registration. I am hopeful that I Will be able to continue practising as a registered dental nurse . The ban has no way impacted on my work and I am fully competent In my place of work and no patients could possibly be in any danger of malpractice from me . Thank you and sorry for this inconvenience...'*

12. I will now announce the Committee's findings in relation to each head of charge:

1.	<p><i>On 11 July 2023, you were convicted at Chester Magistrates' Court of driving a motor vehicle with excess alcohol on 16 June 2023, contrary to section 5(1)(a) of the Road Traffic Act 1988.</i></p> <p><b>Admitted and found proved.</b></p> <p>In addition to the Police records and your own admission, the Committee accepted the certified court extract as conclusive proof of the conviction in accordance with Rule 57(5) of the Rules.</p> <p>Accordingly, the Committee found this charge proved.</p>
2.	<p><i>You failed to inform the General Dental Council immediately that, on or around 16 June 2023, you had been charged with driving a motor vehicle with excess alcohol.</i></p> <p><b>Admitted and found proved.</b></p> <p>The Police records record that you were charged on 17 June 2023.</p> <p>The Committee had regard to the following from <i>Standards for the Dental Team</i> (September 2013):</p> <p><i>"9.3.1 You must inform the GDC immediately if you are subject to any criminal proceedings anywhere in the world. See our guidance on reporting criminal proceedings for more information."</i></p> <p>The referenced guidance on reporting criminal proceedings identifies being charged as a matter about which dental professionals must immediately inform the GDC.</p>

	<p>The Committee was therefore satisfied that you were under a professional duty to have immediately informed the GDC that you had been charged on 17 June 2023 with driving a motor vehicle with excess alcohol. It was not in dispute that you did not inform the GDC until some two months later of the criminal proceedings when you first emailed it on 14 August 2023 to inform it that you had been convicted on 11 July 2023. You had therefore failed to immediately inform it of the criminal proceedings.</p> <p>Accordingly, the Committee found this charge proved.</p>
3.	<i>Your actions in relation to allegation 2 were:</i>
3. (a)	<p><i>Misleading, and/or</i></p> <p><b>Proved.</b></p> <p>Misleading in its ordinary day-to-day usage sometimes refers to a deliberately misleading action, but can also refer to actions or omissions which are inadvertently or not deliberately misleading.</p> <p>As set out under charge 2 above, you were under a basic professional duty to have immediately informed the GDC of any criminal proceedings to which you were subject. The Committee was therefore satisfied that your conduct in not immediately informing the GDC that you had been charged with a criminal offence caused the GDC to be misled into concluding that you were not subject to any criminal proceedings.</p> <p>For the reasons set out under charge 3(b) below, the Committee was not satisfied that your failure to inform the GDC immediately was deliberate or intentional.</p> <p>Accordingly, the Committee found this charge proved.</p>
3. (b)	<p><i>Dishonest.</i></p> <p><b>Not proved.</b></p> <p>In deciding whether your conduct was dishonest, the Committee had regard to the dictum of Lord Hughes <i>Ivey v Genting Casinos (UK) Ltd (t/a Crockfords)</i> [2017] UKSC 67, at paragraph 74:</p> <p><i>‘...When dishonesty is in question the fact-finding tribunal must first ascertain (subjectively) the actual state of the individual’s knowledge or belief as to the facts. The reasonableness or otherwise of his belief is a matter of evidence (often in practice determinative) going to whether he held the belief, but it is not an additional requirement that his belief must be reasonable; the question is whether it is genuinely held. When once his actual state of mind as to knowledge or belief as to facts is established, the question whether his conduct was honest or dishonest is to be determined by the fact-finder by applying the (objective) standards of ordinary decent people. There is no requirement that the defendant must appreciate that what he has done is, by those standards, dishonest.’</i></p>

Accordingly, the first consideration for the Committee was to establish your actual state of mind in respect of your obligation to have immediately informed the GDC that on 17 June 2023 you had been charged with driving a motor vehicle with excess alcohol.

Your evidence was that you knew you were under a duty to have immediately informed the GDC of the criminal proceedings but that doing so “*was the last thing on my mind*” and that “*I didn’t think of it at the time*”. You therefore did not inform the GDC until your email of 14 August 2023 and until after you had spoken with Dentist A and your employers.

You informed the Committee of difficult and distressing personal circumstances which you were in at the time, which you stated contributed both to your offending and to your awareness of your professional obligations in informing the GDC. You denied that you had any intention of misleading the GDC or of concealing from it the fact of the criminal proceedings.

The Committee was satisfied that you knew you had a duty to immediately inform the GDC of criminal proceedings. This was apparent from your own admission and also from the fact that some 18-months earlier you had been convicted of theft, meaning you would have already been familiar with the need to inform the GDC of criminal proceedings.

The issue for the Committee was whether your state of mind in not immediately informing the GDC of the drink-driving charge was one in which you were deliberately trying to mislead or deceive. The Committee determined from your evidence that this was not likely to be the case. It is more likely that you were too distressed, distracted and confused by the difficult and distressing events in your life at the time to think of the need to immediately inform the GDC.

The Committee had regard to the fact that, on your own admission, you had initially acted dishonestly towards the Police by claiming that your drink had been spiked. However, the evidence shows that you were likely to be heavily intoxicated at the time. The Committee therefore rejected Ms Bird’s submission that what you initially tried to claim to the Police was evidence of a dishonest state of mind which then manifested itself as a decision not to immediately inform the GDC of the criminal proceedings.

The Committee noted that you did eventually inform the GDC of the criminal proceedings, albeit only after you had pleaded guilty and had been convicted, and after being prompted by Dentist A and your employers. However, once prompted, you did not wait for the matter to be discovered by other means but self-reported the matter to the GDC.

The Committee was satisfied that this delay in informing the GDC was consistent with the chaotic state of mind which you described in evidence, rather than any deliberate or calculated attempt to conceal from the GDC the fact of the criminal proceedings. Your failure to have immediately

	<p>informed the GDC in those circumstances would not be regarded as dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people.</p> <p>Accordingly, the Committee found this charge not proved.</p>
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13. We move to Stage Two.

*Stage Two 25-26 March 2025*

14. On 17 June 2023 you were charged with driving a motor vehicle with excess alcohol and were convicted on your guilty plea on 11 July 2023 (charge 1) but did not inform the GDC of the criminal proceedings until 14 August 2023. This was in breach of your professional obligation to have immediately informed the GDC upon being charged (charge 2) and resulted in the GDC being misled into assuming that you were not subject to any criminal proceedings (charge 3(a)).
15. At this stage of the proceedings, the Committee shall decide whether your fitness to practise as a dental nurse is impaired by reason of your conviction at charge 1. The Committee shall also decide whether the facts found proved under charges 2 and/or 3(a) amount to misconduct and, if so, whether your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of misconduct.
16. If the Committee finds impairment on either or both grounds, it shall then decide on what action, if any, to take in respect of your registration.
17. Ms Bird addressed the Committee on your fitness to practise history in accordance with Rule 20(1)(a) of the Rules.
18. On 14 December 2021 you were convicted at Chester Magistrates' Court on your guilty plea of theft contrary to sections 1(1) and 7 of the Theft Act 1968. You had stolen a Ring Doorbell to the value of £89.00 on 10 May 2021. You were fined £133.00 and ordered to pay compensation of £89.00 and a victim surcharge of £34.00. A restraining order was also made against you lasting until 13 June 2022. The Case Examiners issued you with a published warning for 6 months in respect of this conviction. The warning stated: '

*The Case Examiners formally warn the Registrant that:*

- *the commission of a criminal offence is unacceptable conduct for a registrant and should not be repeated. Any further criminal convictions will be viewed seriously and will likely call into question her fitness to practise.*
- *she should, as required by the General Dental Council's 'Standards for the Dental Team' (September 2013) publication, maintain appropriate standards of*



*behaviour in her personal life; as detailed in Standard 9.1 (You must ensure that your conduct, both at work and in your personal life, justifies patients' trust in you and the public's trust in the dental profession).'*

19. There was no record before the Committee of any other fitness to practise history or criminal record, beyond your later drink-driving conviction and conduct which are the subject of the present proceedings.
20. Ms Bird submitted that your fitness to practise is currently impaired by reason of both conviction and misconduct and that the appropriate outcome in this case would be a period of suspension for 12 months with a review.
21. You gave evidence to this Committee under affirmation at this stage of the proceedings, in which you discussed your remorse, reflections and personal circumstances. You also put before the Committee numerous testimonials from colleagues and friends in support of your character and performance as a dental nurse.
22. In his submissions on your behalf, Mr Burns, stated that both your convictions occurred during a particularly difficult and distressing period in your life and drew the Committee's attention in particular to your otherwise unblemished record over a long-practising career, your remorse and your reflections.
23. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser.
24. The Committee had regard to the *Guidance for the Practice Committees, including Indicative Sanctions Guidance* (October 2016, last revised December 2020) (the 'ISG').
25. The Committee first considered whether your fitness to practise as a dental nurse is currently impaired by reason of your conviction for driving a motor vehicle with excess alcohol. Whilst there was no evidence before the Committee of any other motoring or alcohol related offence, this was your second criminal offence within a period of approximately 2 years and was only approximately 6 months after the expiry of the warning which had been issued to you by the Case Examiners.
26. The Committee had regard to your evidence that both your theft and drink-driving occurred in the context of difficult and distressing personal circumstances.
27. [IN PRIVATE]
28. [IN PRIVATE].
29. Whilst there was therefore an apparently inconsistent account before the Committee regarding the circumstances of your drink-driving, the Committee accepted your overall evidence that you were in difficult and distressing personal circumstances at the time of



your offending in respect of both convictions. [IN PRIVATE:]

**30. [IN PRIVATE]**

31. The Committee accepted that you were in very difficult and distressing personal circumstances at the time of the theft and the drink-driving which were likely to have influenced your behaviour and thought processes.
32. [IN PRIVATE] You also have the support of your current employer, Dentist A, who spoke highly of your professionalism and commitment to dental nursing. He described you as always punctual, well-presented and professional. The testimonials which you provided to the Committee also spoke highly of you as a person and as a dental nurse, characterising you as a caring dental professional who is committed to her work and who goes the extra mile. The Committee noted that there are no current or historic concerns relating to your clinical skills and competency as a dental nurse.
33. The only fitness to practise issues on record are those relating to your conviction for theft outside of work, your conviction for drink driving and your failure to have immediately informed the GDC upon being charged with drink driving. Outside of what you described as this 'bubble' you otherwise have a wholly unblemished career as a dental nurse of over 20 years. You joined the profession at the age of 17, qualified in 2002 and first registered the GDC in 2008 (when registration for dental nurses was first introduced). The Committee noted that the 'bubble' you describe is consistent with your being in difficult and distressing personal circumstances at that time.
34. However, the Committee also had regard to the fact that you were almost three times over the legal limit and that the seriousness of your drink-driving is reflected in the length of the 24-month driving ban (reduced by 6 months upon the completion of a course) which was imposed on you by the court as part of your sentence. Your criminal behaviour put not only your own life at risk but also that of your passenger and any other nearby road users or pedestrians. You could have killed or seriously harmed someone and yet there was no meaningful reflection or remorse expressed by you to the Committee in this regard.
35. Rather, than express remorse and show respect to the Committee, your conduct during much of the factual inquiry on 24 March 2025 was disruptive. You repeatedly shouted and swore abuse at the Committee, including words to the effect of "I NEED THIS DEALT WITH IMMEDIATELY", "I NEED TO BE ABLE TO WORK", "I WANT THIS SORTED TODAY", "I HAVE LOST TWO FUCKING STONE BECAUSE OF YOU LOT", "I AM NOT GOING THROUGH THIS BOLLOCKS AGAIN" and so on. Your references to wanting the matter dealt with 'immediately' and 'today' were in reference to the fact that this hearing had been listed for 3 days but that you wanted it concluded in 1 as you had other things to attend to. When being cross-examined, you stated that you were "fuming" and repeatedly refused to answer questions which were being put to you, shouting that your drink-driving conviction was not relevant to your work as a dental

nurse. You also repeatedly shouted “STRIKE ME OFF THE REGISTER THEN” and repeatedly called for the Committee to just tell you whether you were going to be suspended or ‘struck off’. These were not isolated outbursts but were sustained throughout much of the hearing on that day and involved shouting over others, including the Chair of the committee. On occasion your own representative had to mute your microphone as it would otherwise have been impossible for any progress to be made with the hearing.

36. These outbursts took place throughout most of the hearing on 24 March 2025. You were however calm and respectful to the Committee at the initial opening of the hearing in the morning and you became calm again later in the day when Dentist A gave evidence to the Committee. You were also calm and respectful to the Committee following the announcement of the findings of fact yesterday 25 March 2025 and when giving evidence at Stage Two. The Committee recognises that these are extremely stressful proceedings and that you have been waiting for some two years for this matter to reach a conclusion. Your anxiety levels were understandably very high but the way in which you conducted yourself towards this Professional Conduct Committee of your regulatory body was unacceptable.
37. You have demonstrated a disregard for the regulatory role of the GDC and the professional standards of the profession. In particular, you show only limited insight into the seriousness of your conviction and its impact on the reputation of the profession. In respect of remediation, you told the Committee that your Continuing Professional Development (CPD) was up to date but you did not provide any detail of the CPD or its relevance to the matters before the Committee today. The only evidence of relevant remediation is your completion of a driving awareness course as part of your sentence to reduce the period of your disqualification from driving by 6 months. Whilst the Committee does not consider the risk of your engaging in drink-driving again to be high, there remains some risk of repetition if you were again to find yourself in difficult and distressing personal circumstances.
38. Moreover, public confidence in the profession and its regulation would be seriously undermined if no finding of impairment were to be made to mark the seriousness of what is now your second criminal conviction, in respect of which you demonstrate only limited insight.
39. Accordingly, the Committee determined that your fitness to practise is currently impaired by reason of your conviction.
40. The Committee next considered whether your fitness to practise is also currently impaired by reason of misconduct in respect of your failure to have immediately informed the GDC of the criminal proceedings leading to your drink-driving conviction.

41. The Committee was satisfied that your delay in informing the GDC was a serious breach of basic professional standards to which you and all other members of the profession are subject. Whilst the Committee did not find that there was any deliberate attempt by you to mislead or deceive the GDC, the effect of your conduct meant that it was misled into assuming that you were not subject to any criminal proceedings. Your failure to have immediately informed it that you had been charged with drink-driving frustrated its regulatory role and prevented it from being able to investigate your fitness to practise at the time, in order to maintain the integrity of its registers.
42. The fact that you had been charged with drink-driving was likely to have attracted heightened regulatory scrutiny, as this would be a second criminal offence in short period of time and following the recent expiry of a warning from the Case Examiners. It was also an alleged offence involving the misuse of alcohol, which potentially engages wider concerns which the GDC was prevented from assessing at the time. The Committee considered that you only eventually notified the GDC having been prompted to do so by Dentist A and you employers.
43. The Committee was therefore satisfied that the facts found proved under charges 2 and 3(a) were serious breaches of professional standards and amount to misconduct.
44. The Committee then considered whether your fitness to practise is currently impaired by reason of that misconduct. The Committee had regard to whether your misconduct is remediable, whether it had been remedied and the risk of repetition. The Committee also had regard to the wider public interest, which includes the need to uphold and declare appropriate standards of conduct and behaviour.
45. In the Committee's judgment, as with your conviction, you only demonstrate limited insight and remorse. Whilst your misconduct is narrow in scope and could be remedied through meaningful reflection, there was a lack of evidence before the Committee in this regard. On the contrary, you engaged in the disruptive behaviour described above, which showed a lack of respect for the Committee and the professional standards which it seeks to uphold. The Committee could not be satisfied that the risk of your repeating your misconduct would be low if you were again to find yourself in difficult or distressing circumstances.
46. Moreover, public confidence in the profession and its regulation would be seriously undermined if no finding of impairment were to be made to mark your misconduct in circumstances, where you show only limited insight and where you had shown a lack of respect for this regulatory process.
47. Accordingly, the Committee determined that your fitness to practise is currently impaired by reason of misconduct.

### *Sanction*

48. The next consideration for the Committee was what action, if any, to take in respect of your registration. The purpose of a sanction is not to be punitive, although it may have that effect, but to protect the public and the wider public interest.
49. The Committee had regard to the aggravating and mitigating features present in this case.
50. The aggravating features include your earlier conviction for theft, the ensuing warning from the Case Examiners and the wilful and blatant disregard you showed for the GDC and the systems regulating the profession through your disruptive conduct of the factual inquiry stage of this hearing.
51. In mitigation, the Committee accepted the chaotic personal circumstances you were in at the time; the evidence of good conduct since the events in question; your earlier long unblemished career; the successful completion of your driving awareness course; and the fact that you are no longer disqualified from driving and have served your sentence. The Committee also had regard to the numerous testimonials in support of your character and accepted your evidence that all the referees were aware of the charges.
52. The Committee considered sanction in ascending order of severity.
53. To conclude this case with no further action or a reprimand would be inappropriate because of the seriousness of your misconduct and conviction, and because of your disrespectful behaviour during the hearing.
54. The Committee could not identify any conditions of practice which could be formulated to be measurable, workable and proportionate. This is because your misconduct and conviction involve behavioural and attitudinal issues which cannot be meaningfully or adequately addressed through conditional registration.
55. The Committee next considered whether to direct that your registration be suspended for a period of up to 12 months, with or without a review. The Committee determined that a period of suspension of four months is the appropriate sanction in this case to mark not only the seriousness of your misconduct and conviction, in respect of which you demonstrate only limited insight, but also to declare the unacceptability of acting in an abusive or disrespectful way when appearing before your regulatory body. The Committee was satisfied that a period of suspension is sufficient to protect the public and maintain wider public confidence in the profession. The period of suspension of four months shall be reviewed prior to its expiry.
56. You should use this period of suspension to reflect upon your conduct. The Committee reviewing your case might be assisted by evidence that you have kept up to date with your CPD requirements and by written reflections from you on Standard 9 of the GDC's *Standards for the Dental Team*, including reflection on: (i) your misconduct and the seriousness of your conviction; (ii) how your conduct outside of work can impact on the

reputation of the profession; (iii) the importance of the GDC and its regulatory role; and (iv) how you would ensure you continue to adhere to the GDC's standards if you were again to find yourself in difficult or distressing personal circumstances.

57. The Committee now invites submissions on the question of an immediate order.

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1. Ms Bird submitted that she had no instructions to seek an immediate order in this case.
2. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser on its power to make an immediate order. There being no application for an immediate order, the Committee determined during the hearing that no immediate order should be made.
3. Accordingly, no immediate order is made. Unless you exercise your right of appeal, the four-month period of suspension shall take effect upon the expiry of the 28-day appeal period.