

Stephanie Merrill

Employee

7008990

[Employee-related decision Date: 20 November 2024](#)

Decision - Employee-related decision

Outcome: Control of non-qualified staff (Section 43 / Section 99 order)

Outcome date: 20 November 2024

Published date: 8 January 2025

Firm details

Firm or organisation at time of matters giving rise to outcome

Name: Lanyon Bowdler LLP

Address(es): Chapter House North, Abbey Lawn, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, SY2 5DE

Firm ID: 534828

Outcome details

This outcome was reached by SRA decision.

Decision details

Who does this decision relate to?

Stephanie Merrill, who is not a solicitor, was employed by Lanyon Bowdler LLP, a licensed body, whose office is at Chapter House North, Abbey Lawn, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury (the firm) between 1 September 2020 and 4 November 2022.

Summary of decision

A finding of dishonesty was made against Ms Merrill, and she was made subject to a disqualification order under section 99 of the Legal Services Act 2007.

The SRA has disqualified Ms Merrill from holding any of the following roles in law firms regulated by the SRA:

- Head of Legal Practice



- Head of Finance and Administration
- A manager
- An employee

The facts of the case

Ms Merrill was employed by the firm on 1 September 2020 as a medical legal assistant. She started a training contract with the firm on 5 September 2022.

On 23 September 2022, Ms Merrill made a request to the firm for annual leave to be taken on 3 October 2022. She stated that this was because she wanted to take a relative to a hospital appointment.

On 10 October 2022, the firm was notified that at a court hearing on 3 October 2022, Cheshire East Council was granted an injunction against Ms Merrill in respect of planning breaches on land she occupied.

The firm began an investigation into Ms Merrill's conduct. On 31 October 2022, in a signed statement of truth, Ms Merrill told the firm that before she found out about the court hearing, she agreed to take her relative to a hospital appointment and that was the reason why she requested leave for 3 October 2022.

She said that it was only on 2 October 2022 that she decided she must attend the court hearing. On that date she therefore told her relative she would not be able to take them to their hospital appointment. Ms Merrill repeated her account at a disciplinary hearing held by the firm. She also provided the firm with a copy of a letter from the hospital to her relative giving details of their hospital appointment on 3 October 2022.

The firm were not satisfied with Ms Merrill's explanation. On 4 November 2022, the firm dismissed her for gross misconduct. Its reasons included that she sought to mislead the firm about her reason for requesting annual leave.

The firm reported Ms Merrill's conduct to the SRA who commenced an investigation. Ms Merrill admitted that she misled the firm when she told it that the reason she requested leave was to take her relative to a hospital appointment.

She said her relative's appointment was on 4 October, not 3 October 2022. She admitted that on 1 November 2022, she provided the firm with an edited version of her relative's appointment letter in which the date of the appointment had been changed to show it as being on 3 October 2022 rather than the true date of the appointment, namely 4 October 2022.

It was found that:

Between 23 September 2022 and 1 November 2022, Ms Merrill provided false and misleading information and documentation to the firm in relation to her request for annual leave for 3 October 2022.

Our decision on sanction

Ms Merrill's conduct breached relevant duties that applied to her as an employee of the firm, namely, Principles 2, 4 and 5 of the SRA Principles 2019.

It was found that it would be undesirable for Ms Merrill to act as a Head of Legal Practice, Head of Finance and Administration, a manager or an employee of a body licensed in accordance with section 99 of the Legal Services Act 2007.

Ms Merrill was disqualified from holding any of these roles.

She was also directed to pay costs of £600.

SRA Principles 2019

SRA Principle 2 You act in a way that upholds public trust and confidence in the solicitors' profession and in legal services provided by authorised persons.

SRA Principle 4 You act with honesty.

SRA Principle 5 You act with integrity.

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