



# GUIDANCE ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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## 1. WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

- 1.1 'Social media' is the term commonly given to websites and online tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests.
- 1.2 Examples of social media websites include:
- social networking (e.g. [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com))
  - video sharing (e.g. [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com))
  - blogs (e.g. <http://googleblog.blogspot.co.uk/>)
  - micro-blogging (e.g. [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com))
  - message boards (e.g. <http://forums.moneysavingexpert.com>)
  - wikis (e.g. [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))
  - social bookmarking (e.g. [www.delicious.com](http://www.delicious.com))
- 1.3 Social media can be useful tools for communicating with our customers and service users, but such media must be used carefully to avoid potential problems and the risk of possible disciplinary action, damage to the Council's reputation and even legal action being taken against the Council.

## 2. SCOPE

- 2.1 This guidance applies to all council employees and elected members. The guidance aims to raise awareness of the implications of using social media, by individuals having some role within the Council, and it provides a framework for making responsible decisions about getting the most out of social media tools.
- 2.2 Currently, access to social media websites from the Council's IT network is only granted for specific service reasons, there is no general access for staff and members. However, outside of the Council, we can all freely access social media sites, from home, mobile 'phones, public internet (cafes, libraries etc.). This 'outside-of-work' access needs to be handled in a sensible and considered way so that neither the individual(s) involved nor the Council is put at potential risk of embarrassment, loss, disciplinary action or criminal proceedings.

## 3. GENERAL GUIDELINES

To use Social Media safely you should be mindful of the following general guidance.

Information is also available on Staffnet/socialmedia

### 3.1 Personal Use Of Social Media

- When using third-party websites (such as Facebook), know and follow the terms and conditions of use.

- Understand how to implement privacy tools i.e. only allowing known people to access information about you / see the content of your site. The more personal information you put on the site the more vulnerable you are to identity fraud
- Never publish or disclose any information about the Council which is not already in the public arena. Be mindful that whatever you publish may be in the public arena for a long time and that doing so may result in disciplinary action being taken against you.
- Do not publish or report on conversations that are meant to be private or internal to the Council. Do not cite or reference customers, partners or suppliers.
- Ensure that your online activities do not interfere with your job, your colleagues or commitments to customers.
- Do not befriend service users you have to maintain a professional relationship with or individuals you support.
- Posting your feelings or just having a moan can give you or the council a very negative image “I am so glad it is Friday, I hate this place at the moment, need a new job” is not the comment you want your team colleagues, customers, the individuals you support or suppliers to read. It gives a very unprofessional view of the service you provide.
- It is very easy to damage your own reputation so be careful. Pictures of that recent lively social event may be great to share between friends but what image of you may they represent to the individuals you support?
- Do not use social media to attack or abuse colleagues, customers or suppliers. Respect the privacy, feelings, reputation and position of others you work with.
- Do not include contact details or pictures of other staff members without their permission.
- Respect copyright laws.
- When you're finished, don't forget to log off / close your account. This is particularly important if accessing your account from a public place rather than a personal device.
- Forgetting to log off increases the risk that someone else will take and misuse your personal details and information, or that someone will misuse your account to publish undesirable comments or photos.

## 3.2 Professional Use of Social Media

**3.2.1** If you are using social media in a work-related professional capacity, then you need to be mindful of the following additional guidance:

- In the following guidelines, the term “**profile**” refers to an account, page or website representing the council, one of its services or an officer.
- The term “**group**” refers to a web page, website, or section of a website where people with a shared interest can interact.
- Before creating a new profile or group, check whether one already exists serving the same audience. It may be more appropriate for the council to join an existing group than create a rival group.

- Work-based profiles or groups should only be created following agreement by your line manager, who should consult with the Head of Communications and the Web Manager before giving authorization.
- In general, it is better to create content for the corporate social media accounts which already have a large audience instead of trying to build an audience from scratch, which takes considerable time and resources.
- New profiles and groups will only be agreed if a clear business need can be proven, and sufficient resources are made available to maintain it and respond to feedback generated by the service or project lead.
- The profile or group will be the responsibility of the service area in terms of content management and must be updated on a regular basis to ensure content is fresh and relevant.
- A single, named person, in the service area requesting the site, must be responsible for maintaining the profile or group and for overseeing the content of the site. This is the role of the moderator. Other approved contributors may also be nominated to assist the moderator.
- Approved contributors should be made aware of these guidelines.
- If a profile or group is set up in the name of a group, for example, it is essential that a member of staff becomes a member of it and oversees the content and activity. The moderator should monitor site content, conversations, images and other activity of members of the group and challenge, educate or intervene as necessary. The moderator should educate members of the group about online safety, including how to customise privacy settings. (For information and resources see <http://www.thinkuknow.co.uk>). Remember that most social media sites have minimum age limits so many are not suitable for youth groups.
- Staff must not publish images of people unless consent has been given in writing, using an official photograph consent form.
- Staff should maintain boundaries between their personal and professional lives by customising their privacy settings and avoiding inappropriate personal information becoming visible to members of the group or profile.
- Respect your audience. Do not publish anything that would not be acceptable in the workplace. You should also show proper consideration for others' privacy and for topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory, such as politics and religion.
- Write in the first person ("I" or "we").
- Wherever possible, disclose your position as a representative of your department, division or team.
- Remember that you are representing the council and be cordial at all times.
- Do not correct contributors' spelling or grammar.
- Do not edit other people's contributions (with the exception of the next point). Instead of editing or removing significant factual errors, you should either make a public response or directly contact the person who made the original comment, or both.
- If a contributor makes a comment that is defamatory or likely to cause extreme offense, edit or remove it where possible. If this is not possible, report it to the operator of the website. Contact the user to explain why

you took this action, and if appropriate ask them to post the comment again without the offensive content. Use inappropriate word filters where possible e.g. in Facebook's settings.

- All feedback to the council through social networking sites should be monitored by the responsible service. Feedback that requires a response must be acknowledged within one working day. Where action is required, bear in mind that excessive delay will have a negative impact on the council's reputation.
- Remember that Freedom of Information requests can be submitted through social media accounts so accounts need to be monitored frequently.

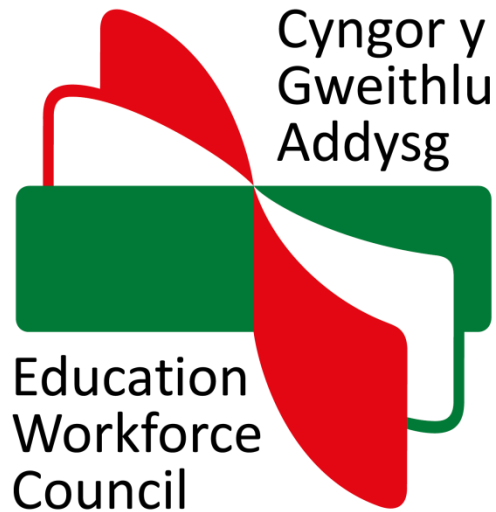
### **3.3 Professional Judgement**

3.3.1 Social media is just another means of individuals or groups communicating – with a couple of significant features: content and conversations are not private and whatever is written / published can remain on display forever and visible in search engines like Google or Bing. Therefore, if you are using social media to interact with an individual or group in a work/professional capacity, you need to be mindful of these features of social media and make a professional judgment as to how appropriate such media is to support such an interaction. It is impossible to give rigid guidelines to help with such a judgment and the risks need to be evaluated against the benefits. For many situations the decision to use or to continue to use social media should not be an individual decision but should be taken in conjunction with a supervisor or manager. Where Professional Standards and/or Codes of Practice apply these should be adhered to.

## **4. ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT**

4.1 These guidelines were produced by the Head of Communications and Customer Engagement and have drawn from a number of similar guidelines drawn from the UK Public Sector. These guidelines were approved by Corporate Management Team on 1 Nov 2010.





# **Education Workforce Council**

## **Guide to using social media responsibly**

**February 2016**

## **1.0 Introduction**

Social media are a range of web-based applications that allow people to create and exchange content. The popularity of social media has grown rapidly in recent years with widespread use of sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn, as well as dating websites, blogs, emails, texting and instant messaging.

When used responsibly and appropriately, social media can offer you several benefits as an education practitioner, such as:

- building and maintaining professional relationships;
- giving you access to support networks, providing a means of discussing professional issues and sharing good practice;
- providing access to professional learning opportunities and / or educational resources.

However, there are also a number of dangers and pitfalls you need to be aware of when using social media. This guide aims to help you by highlighting how those dangers and pitfalls could affect you, and potentially your ability to continue practising.

All Education Workforce Council (EWC) registered practitioners are subject to the Code of Professional Conduct and Practice which sets out the key principles of good conduct and practice for registrants. This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Code which can be downloaded from our website.

## **2.0 Dangers and pitfalls of using social media**

### **2.1 Common issues facing professionals**

The way you use social media in your private life is a matter for your own personal judgment. However, you should still exercise caution in the content you upload to any social media site and consider whether it could compromise public confidence in the education workforce.

Using social media can blur the boundary between your private and professional life and these days all professions are subject to far greater public scrutiny making practitioners vulnerable to unintended misuse. It is inevitable that people (learners, parents, public, prospective employers) will be curious about individual practitioners and may try to find out information about you.

It is therefore important you are cautious about which social media you use, and how and with whom you communicate.

Bear in mind:

- the standards expected of you do not change because you are communicating through social media;



- email, texting, blogging and other social media communication encourages casual dialogue. Innocent comments or posts can be misconstrued or manipulated. The 'feel' can be different;
- you can be vulnerable to unintended misuses;
- acknowledging, liking or sharing someone else's post can imply you endorse or support their point of view;
- you can be mentioned / identifiable in inappropriate posts, sometimes without your knowledge or consent;
- your conduct online does not have to relate to learners in order for it to have a bearing on your fitness to practise;
- postings online are subject to the same laws of copyright and defamation as written / verbal communication;
- unwise behaviour online can result in criminal or civil action.

## **2.2 Privacy and confidentiality**

Bear in mind the personal material you might intend only to share with friends or family could be accessible to a much wider audience, and that once uploaded to the web, it may not be possible to delete it or control how widely it is shared.

Some social media sites have privacy settings which allow users to control and put restrictions on who has access to their personal information, but the default settings on some sites may allow content to be shared beyond an individual's preferred, closed network of friends or family. It is therefore important you familiarise yourself with the privacy provisions of any social media site you use, and bear in mind the limitations of keeping information private online.

If you are unsure whether or not communication you post online could compromise your professionalism or reputation, think carefully about the appropriateness of posting it.

In particular, you should be aware that:

- your personal information can easily be accessed by others. Social media sites cannot guarantee privacy regardless of what settings are in place;
- once information is published online, your control of it is lost. It can be difficult to remove as other users may share or comment on it;
- information uploaded anonymously can, in many cases, be traced back to its point of origin;
- information about your location may be embedded within photographs and other content, and available for others to see;
- although individual pieces of information may not breach confidentiality on their own, the sum of published information online can be enough to identify a learner or parent and consequently have potential for reputational damage to you, and possibly your employer.

### **3.0 Examples of cases investigated by the EWC**

The examples below are some of the cases referred to the EWC for investigation relating to social media. These are illustrations of where practitioners have breached the Code of Professional Conduct and Practice:

- a teacher engaged in a sexual relationship with a learner which began with communication via mobile telephone and text messages with sexual content;
- a teacher sent a string of sexually explicit messages via Facebook and Skype to a learner;
- a teacher's computer was found with hundreds of downloaded indecent images on it;
- a teacher with a number of learners as 'friends' on Facebook posted inappropriate comments about drinking and parties;
- a teacher subject to an EWC hearing received disproportionate press coverage when inappropriate photographs and video clips previously posted online were accessed by the press;
- a teacher used an eBay account to illegally sell counterfeit goods;
- a teacher re-tweeted insulting comments about the victim of a serious criminal offence;
- a teacher posed online as a pupil and made a false report to a charity helpline about a senior member of staff.

### **4.0 Guidance to help practitioners minimise risk when using social media. You should:**

#### **4.1 Follow the guidance**

- adhere to employer or agency policies, procedures and guidelines using official channels of communication;
- adhere to the EWC Code of Professional Conduct and Practice;
- use trade union and other guidance;
- understand any social media application before using it, and be clear about its advantages / disadvantages.

#### **4.2 Act responsibly**

- conduct yourself online in a way which does not call into question your position as a professional;
- consider your online persona and how others perceive you. Be careful when writing profiles or establishing email addresses;
- never create a false identity;
- consider who or what you associate with online, and always maintain professional boundaries with learners;
- never exchange private phone numbers, personal e-mail addresses or photographs of a personal nature with learners;
- never accept or initiate Facebook friend requests, or other such invites, with current or former learners. Discretion should be used when dealing with friend requests from parents;

- ensure your privacy settings are appropriate, and be aware that not all information can be protected on the web - there is no privacy mechanism that is 100% guaranteed;
- ensure your settings prohibit others from tagging you in any photograph or update without your permission;
- be aware of photographs published online which include you, and where they may be posted;
- do not discuss learners, parents, or colleagues online, or criticise your employer;
- protect yourself by always logging out of any social media site you are using at the end of a session.

### **4.3 Not be complacent**

- be aware that others may try and view your online social media profiles, or even just Google your name. For example, potential employers, learners, parents, press officers;
- appreciate that learners will be curious about you, and may search the internet for your personal information;
- manage your privacy settings, especially in relation to photos. If you do not, assume the information you post will remain in the public domain, and be capable of being accessed, changed, shared and manipulated;
- audit and re-evaluate information about your online self regularly, and ask others to remove any undesirable content about you;
- use strong passwords and change them regularly. Never share passwords;
- protect your mobile telephone, laptop, tablet. Know where they are and who has access to them;
- bring any social media concerns to the attention of your employer or agent as soon as you become aware.

### **4.4 Summary**

Before posting anything online, ask yourself:

- might what I'm posting reflect poorly on me, my employer or profession?
- is my intention to make the post driven by personal or professional reasons?
- am I confident that the posting, if accessed by others (colleagues, public, parents etc) would be considered reasonable and appropriate for a professional?

### **5.0 How we can help you further**

- The EWC offer presentations which focus on fitness to practise and the use of social media. If you or your employer would like to arrange one in your school or college please contact ([information@ewc.wales](mailto:information@ewc.wales));
- The EWC's Code of Professional Conduct and Practice for Registrants with the Education Workforce Council, and Information about the EWC's fitness to practise work can be found on its website [www.ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/fitness-to-practiseFitness](http://www.ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/fitness-to-practiseFitness)
- Any queries should be referred to the Fitness to Practise Team at [fitnesstopractise@ewc.wales](mailto:fitnesstopractise@ewc.wales).