

**Inspiring world-class
teaching professionalism**



Engaging online

A guide for teachers

Endorsed by the Teaching Professional Associations of Scotland

What is this guide for?

Technology allows teachers to enhance their classroom practice, share resources, introduce students to new tools and deliver the curriculum in innovative and engaging ways. It can, however, present some challenges particularly when it comes to social media and when storing learners' data.

The purpose of this guide is to provide support for teachers to reflect on their actions and consider whether they may need further advice or professional learning. This guide is intended to complement your employer's policies and to help you stay safe online and on social media. It is the first in a series of guides which will be produced by GTC Scotland. The guides **do not** form part of the Professional Code for teachers. Teachers and schools may find them useful professional learning and discussion tools but they are not intended for use in any competency or conduct process. They are part of GTC Scotland's services to teachers to enhance teacher professionalism as part of our advisory role as the professional body for all of Scotland's teachers.

What is expected of teachers

Your commitment to the professional values of integrity, trust and respect and social justice should be demonstrated in your online activity both at work and at home. Moreover, as teachers you have a responsibility to be positive role models to learners; exercising sound judgement and due care at all times when online, and setting an example of good digital habits.

When your professional life coincides with your personal life, exercising professional judgement is key.

In circumstances where bespoke arrangements are in place, please make sure to follow relevant policy.



How to communicate online

Your school's account

Online communication can encourage casual dialogue – think emojis, text-speak, gifs – and can often disarm inhibitions as it brings a new dimension and 'feel' to relationships. As a result, the traditional boundaries between teacher, learner and parent, can quickly become blurred.

Teachers need to be alert to this; maintaining a formal, professional tone online and communicating with learners and parents only through a school account, will help build professional relationships and maintain appropriate boundaries. Where other arrangements are in place, they should be underpinned by policy and clearly understood.

It is equally important to consider what you post online and on social media.

It's easy to share information that could for example, inadvertently identify someone. Your employer's policy will outline what is acceptable, for example in relation to photos and videos, and which communication methods are to be used in particular circumstances.

Your personal accounts

Teachers' views about their professionalism are central to the integrity of a self-regulating profession. While you may think it helpful to offer your professional view in online conversations, it may not be the right forum for discussion. Even comments which may seem quite innocent can be misconstrued by others or carry a different impact and meaning depending on the context. Including disclaimers such as "Views my own" do not provide any form of protection from what is posted. Moreover, while it can be easy to get caught in the heat of the moment, posting frustrations online will remain online permanently, in some form or another, even after the original post has been deleted. Limiting what you say online

and being particularly careful about how you say it reduces risk significantly.

Engaging safely online isn't just about what you post, it's also about who you follow and what they post. Many people do not need to be as circumspect online as teachers, which is why you need to be vigilant about who you allow into your networks and what is shared through your feeds. Comments from family or friends may not be appropriate for teachers to share. It's important to assess posts before they are shared to prevent any negative associations.

The natural curiosity of learners, parents and even potential employers, results in teachers' online activity being searched by others. While auditing your personal online accounts and restricting privacy settings is not a guarantee of anonymity, it will help you control your online footprint. Practising good cyber security helps minimise the risk of your conversations being accessed and altered.

If you are concerned about your online safety or if you are being trolled, let your school know immediately.

How to keep learners' data safe

From marks recorded in cloud-based systems such as Glow, to fingerprints used for cashless canteens and images recorded on CCTV, learners' data takes many different forms and is obtained and stored in a variety of ways. This data needs to be kept safe, which means ensuring it is obtained with appropriate permissions, used for specific purposes and stored securely. If it isn't, the data is more likely to be vulnerable to cyberattacks and data breaches – there may even be legal implications. It is also important to be aware that under data protection legislation, learners have a right to obtain a copy of the information held on them; and this includes on social media.









What you can do

Check your accounts regularly and review what your followers or friends have posted, who you have added and who has added you.

In addition, familiarise yourself with your employer's policies and ask yourself:

- Will this online content reflect poorly on me, my school or the teaching profession?
- Am I confident that the comment, if accessed by colleagues, parents etc, would be considered reasonable and appropriate?
- Am I sharing or storing this photo, video etc in line with my employer's policy?
- Are my social media accounts set to 'private'?
- Have I considered the consequences of who or what I am associated with online?
- Is my password secure? Am I accessing this information over a trusted network?
- Do I understand my employer's policies about information sharing and data retention?
- Am I using employer-approved systems?
- Am I clear about which system is to be used for which purpose?
- Do I model positive online and digital behaviours?
- Do I provide online tutoring outwith a formal employment contract? If so, ensure you follow relevant legal advice.

Additional resources

- [Read 'Techno-vantages' from Teaching Scotland, Issue 77](#) 
- [Family lives \(digital footprint\)](#) 
- www.getsafeonline.org 
- www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre 
- www.respectme.org.uk 
- [GTC Scotland health and wellbeing hub](#) 
- [Contact your employer or professional association](#)

The Teaching Professional Associations of Scotland are: Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland (AHDS), Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), School Leaders Scotland (SLS), Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association (SSTA) and Voice.

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