

Date: 26 January 2026

Refreshed GTC Scotland guide for teachers - Engaging online, AI and expression of views

Dear Colleague

I am writing to let you know that we are refreshing [*Engaging online: a guide for teachers*](#), which was published on 1 October 2021. This draft refreshed guide was approved by GTC Scotland's Council on 4 December 2025 and is attached to this letter along with a summary of the proposed changes.

As key stakeholders, the aim of this letter is to inform you of the proposed changes and to offer you the opportunity to comment on them before the final version of the guide is approved by our Council.

As the guide is currently at a draft stage we ask that you keep it confidential.

If you have any comments on the guide, please send these to gtcs@gtcs.org.uk by Friday 27 March 2026.

Why refresh the guide?

We are refreshing the guide to ensure generally that it continues to promote and uphold teaching standards, particularly in relation to the Code of Professionalism and Conduct (COPAC). The refresh also addresses particular areas of concern that have been highlighted to us over time and that we also identified within our [*Fitness to Teach Insight Report 2018–2023*](#), most notably in relation to public and digital expression of views.

COPAC is designed to support teachers in exercising sound professional judgement and making informed and ethical decisions in their daily practice, underpinned by the Professional Standards. Our guides for teachers are designed to provide more detailed explanations of the standards and broadly describe what is expected of teachers in a range of contexts and across the teacher journey. The guides aim to reinforce the principle that teaching is a trusted and respected profession. By articulating standards of conduct and competence, they help sustain public confidence and uphold the integrity of the teaching profession.

Charity number: SC006187

Working together to promote teaching standards

As the regulator of teachers, a core part of our role is to inform and educate teachers on areas of risk and therefore help protect learners. As key stakeholders, you can support this work by helping to build awareness and understanding of the guide within your organisations, supporting informed professional dialogue, and engaging with GTC Scotland as the guide is embedded following publication, which we anticipate will be at the end of the year.

We look forward to hearing from you if you have any comments to provide on the guide.

Many thanks in advance for your help and support.

Kind regards,



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Charity number: SC006187



Engaging online, AI and expression of views

A professional guide for teachers

Published: V12 December 2025 draft

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What is this guide for?

Teaching is complex work which requires constant ethical decision making. What teachers think, value and do really matters. One of GTC Scotland's roles is to champion and enhance teacher professionalism. This involves providing information or advice where we identify any risk areas, where further focus is required to embed teaching standards or when action is needed to assure trust in teaching.

As a teacher, you are expected to act in an ethical way in your use of technology and when expressing your views. Social media, artificial intelligence and data protection are areas that present both benefits and risks.

This guide is intended to inform your understanding of ethical behaviour in these areas and how they interact with legislation and your professional responsibilities. It prompts you to consider your actions and whether you might require further advice or professional learning.

This guide is for GTC Scotland registered teachers. For the purposes of this guide, teachers include teachers of primary, secondary, additional support needs and further education. You should read this together with the Professional Standards for Teachers and the Code of Professionalism and Conduct (COPAC) set by GTC Scotland which describe teacher professionalism in Scotland.

GTC Scotland is the independent regulator for teachers in Scotland. We work in the public interest to enhance trust in teaching by setting, upholding and promoting high standards. This guide is also relevant to anyone wishing to understand the expectations of registered teachers when engaging online or expressing views.

What is expected of teachers?

COPAC sets out the principles of conduct that are expected of teachers in meeting their professional and ethical obligations. It is designed to provide guidance and raise awareness of issues and situations which can potentially arise. Parallel to this, the professional values of

social justice, trust and respect and integrity are core to the Professional Standards and underpin your identity as a teacher.

Your commitment to these professional values should be demonstrated in your online activity both at work and outside of work. As a teacher, you have a responsibility to be a positive role model to learners, always exercising sound judgement and due care when online. What you say and do in your professional and private life, whether online or in person, shapes the way that people think about you and the reputation of the teaching profession in Scotland.

Employers will also have expectations of you and your conduct. You should be familiar with and understand their policies.

How to communicate online

Your school or workplace account

Online communication can encourage casual dialogue, for example, emojis, text-speak and GIFs. These can often disarm inhibitions, bringing a new dimension and 'feel' to relationships. As a result, traditional boundaries between teacher, learner, colleagues, parents and carers, can become blurred. Teachers need to be alert to this by maintaining a professional tone online. In your professional capacity, you should communicate with learners, parents and carers through official school or college platforms. This helps build professional relationships and maintain appropriate professional boundaries.

Your personal account

Your commitment to maintaining teaching standards is central to the integrity of professional regulation. It is important to consider what you post online, on social media, and who and what you associate with on social media.

Engaging safely and ethically 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 mindful online as teachers do,

which is why you need to be vigilant about who you allow into your networks, who you share your personal account(s) information with and what is shared through your social media. You need to exercise professional and ethical diligence when your personal and professional life inhabit the same communities.

Comments from family, friends or others may not be appropriate for teachers to share. It's important to assess the suitability of posts thoroughly before they are shared to prevent any negative associations and their impact on your professional standing.

Your online activity may be searched by learners, parents or carers or potential employers.

Checking your personal online accounts and restricting privacy settings will help you control your online footprint. Practising good cyber security helps minimise the risk of your conversations, photos, events attended – anything linked to your personal life – being accessed and altered. You should review your visible historic social media posts to ensure they align with your professional values. Once you post, you have lost control over the comment or data you have shared.

Keeping learners' data safe

COPAC 2.1 – 'You must treat sensitive, personal information about learners with respect and confidentiality and not disclose it unless required to do so by your employer or by law.'

As a trusted teacher you have access to sensitive information about learners. You must collect, store and use personal data safely and lawfully. Failure to do so can have legal implications. Learners' data takes different forms and is gathered and stored in a variety of ways. Data must be obtained with appropriate permissions, used for specific purposes, and stored securely. If it is not, the data is more vulnerable to cyberattacks and data breaches. It is important to be aware that under data protection legislation, learners have a right to request a copy of the information held on them; and this includes on social media.

You should ensure that you are familiar with, refer to and carefully follow your school or employer's data protection policy and privacy notices when accessing and using learners' data.

COPAC 4.5 – ‘Be mindful of Data Protection Act requirements concerning handling information about parents, carers and learners.’

Expression of views

Teachers, like all other citizens, have the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right is balanced with your duty to safeguard learners, promote equality and inclusion and maintain public trust in the profession.

Teachers are expected to uphold their professional values in their public and online conduct as well as in their work environment.

It is important to avoid making public or online statements which could cast doubt on your ability to discharge your professional duties. Comments that could be interpreted by others as offensive, abusive or inflammatory could give rise to a reasonable impression that you discriminate against certain types of learners, parents, carers and colleagues. Your online and public statements must be consistent with maintaining the reputation of the teaching profession and with protecting the rights of all learners and colleagues.

If you have any concerns about a view you have expressed, online or in public, you should seek advice from your employer.

COPAC 1.4 - ‘You must uphold standards of personal and professional conduct, honesty and integrity so that the public have confidence in you as a teacher and teaching as a profession.’

Online Conduct

Teachers should be mindful when engaging in online spaces (for example, social media, blogs and forums). The disclaimer “views are my own” is unlikely to provide protection from any repercussions of what is posted. What you share reflects on you and the teaching profession.

You must avoid posting content or engaging in discussions which could be perceived as discriminatory, offensive, obscene or sexually explicit in a way that undermines your professional role. If you are contributing to professional discussions online, you are expected to be respectful, constructive and act with honesty and integrity, in line with the Professional Standards for Teachers.

Teaching environment

Teachers are expected to model inclusive language. You must avoid expressions that could undermine equality duties or learners' rights.

Teachers sometimes discuss controversial or sensitive topics which are relevant to learning. Discussions must have due regard to learners' age, stage and individual circumstances. All views must be presented fairly. You must remember you have professional responsibilities to promote equality, diversity and inclusion and to tackle discrimination. You, as a teacher, have made a professional commitment to learning and learners that is compatible with the aspiration of achieving a sustainable and equitable world (Professional Standards, 2021).

COPAC 5.3 - 'You should recognise that you are a role model and therefore should be aware of the potentially serious impact which any demonstration by you of intolerance or prejudice could have upon your standing as a teacher and your fitness to teach.'

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The ways in which education uses technology and in which people learn are transforming. As AI becomes increasingly integrated into education settings, it is essential that teachers understand both the opportunities and responsibilities associated with its use, which includes keeping learners safe. AI tools can aid lesson planning, personalise learning, streamline administrative tasks and enhance learner engagement. Its ethical use, by you and your learners, must align with teaching standards, safeguarding practices and the best interests of learners. You must promote responsible use of AI in your educational setting.

You should be mindful of data privacy and intellectual property implications, ensuring that any AI tools used comply with relevant data protection and copyright laws and your employer's policies.

AI continues to be explored as a tool to enhance teaching and learning, but it should not be a replacement for your professional judgement. When using AI-generated content or tools, you must ensure appropriateness and inclusivity. It is important to be conscious of the concerns

which have been raised about AI, for example potential inaccuracies as well as the environmental impact of AI use, such as the carbon and water footprint. You must be transparent with colleagues, learners, parents and carers about the use of AI.

The fast rate at which AI is developing means that guidance and regulation on its use can lag behind the technology itself. In all circumstances, teachers are expected to use their ethical judgment to ensure AI use is safe, responsible and in the best interests of learners

What you can do

To help you engage online and express your views in a safe and responsible manner, you should ask yourself:

- Are my social media accounts set to 'private'?
- Have I considered the consequences of who or what I associate with online?
- Do I check my account regularly for who I have added and who has added me?
- Before I post this online, could the content reflect poorly on me or the teaching profession?
- Am I practising good cyber security to help minimise the risk of my conversations being accessed and altered? For example, is my password secure and am I accessing information over a trusted network?
- Am I storing and using photos, videos and other data in line with my employer's policy and the law?
- Do I understand my employer's policies about information sharing and data retention?
- Am I being open with colleagues, learners, parents and carers about my use of AI in teaching?
- Am I becoming over-reliant on AI which could have an impact on my critical thinking as a teacher?
- Is my use of AI ethical in terms of privacy, equality and sustainability?
- Have I reviewed the [Equality and diversity professional guide for teachers](#) which has further guidance on expression of views and factors to be aware of?
- Have I considered the consequences of what I am planning to say in a public setting?

- Have I reported and followed up on any concerns I have about trolling, online behaviour, expression of views or AI use to my employer?
- Have I considered any professional learning or support I may need?

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The General Teaching Council for Scotland

We are the independent regulator for teachers in Scotland. We work to enhance trust in teachers in the public interest by setting, upholding and promoting high standards.

Website: www.gtcs.org.uk

Email: gtcs@gtcs.org.uk

Appendix 1 - Engaging online, AI and expression of views – summary of changes

Updates

The refreshed guide provides a clearer explanation of GTC Scotland's role in championing and enhancing teacher professionalism. References stating that the guide does not form part of COPAC or apply to competency or conduct processes have been removed, emphasising that it is intended to be read alongside COPAC. The guide further clarifies what is expected of teachers by incorporating COPAC principles and referencing the Professional Standards. It also highlights the importance of adhering to employers' expectations and policies, as well as to the law.

One of the 12 allegation themes identified in our Fitness to Teach Insight Report relates to inappropriate behaviour or language, including inappropriate public expression of views both within and outwith professional settings, for example via social media. This remains a key area of concern in relation to teacher misconduct and has informed the focus of the refreshed guide.

To address this a new section has been introduced on expression of views and provides guidance on the need to exercise professional judgement in both in-person and online contexts. This section highlights the importance of maintaining the Professional Values across all settings and it offers practical advice on expected standards of behaviour. The guide will be further supported by case studies developed as separate resources.

A second new section addresses the use of AI. Given the rapidly evolving nature of AI, this section adopts a broad and principles-based approach while highlighting key themes such as transparency, ethical considerations and awareness of potential risks. It emphasises that AI should be regarded as a tool, and that its use requires the application of professional judgement to ensure it is employed safely and responsibly. The guide has also been refreshed to incorporate changes in line with GTC Scotland's brand guidelines including in relation to use of language.

Process and format

In developing the refreshed guide, the writing group undertook a domestic and international benchmarking exercise and engaged with internal review groups that included teachers from primary, secondary, ASN and further education contexts.

The Professional Standards and COPAC set out regulatory ethical expectations that guide teachers' professional judgement, commitment, actions, behaviour and language. The guide is based on a principles-based approach, which we believe supports professional judgement and teacher autonomy. Critically reflecting on the professional values of trust and respect, integrity and social justice is at the heart of what it means to be a teacher in Scotland. A prescriptive and exhaustive list of do's and don'ts would risk oversimplifying complex professional realities that require teachers to exercise ethical decision-making and professional judgement daily. Employer policies, government guidance and legislation may change over time, and teachers therefore need to remain aware of their responsibilities within their specific contexts and organisational frameworks.