

Social Networking Guidance

A GUIDANCE DOCUMENT FROM THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HEAD TEACHERS

January 2011

NAHT produced a guidance document on this topic in March 2010 in response to a large volume of requests for advice from members facing problems involving social networking sites. The vast majority of concerns were, and continue to be, related to Facebook. This is not due to inherent problems with Facebook per se but a consequence of its widespread use and popularity; one statistic suggested that 14% of the world's population has a Facebook account.

The concern about the potential misuse of social networking sites led the General Teaching Council for Wales to include a reference to the matter in its revised 'Code of Professional Conduct and Practice for Registered Teachers'. Useful as this may be, NAHT only receives a small number of requests for advice over situations involving staff usage, particularly in relation to contact with pupils.

However, it is probably worth bearing in mind, particularly for those not of the 'Facebook generation', that for many young teachers leaving university social networking is a way of life and there could be an innocent lack of awareness of the detrimental and unprofessional impact that this culture can have in school. The implication is that schools ought to give serious consideration to including the matter in induction programmes.

The original NAHT guidance identified the potential uses of social networking that can cause problems.

Such concerns fall into a number of distinct categories. These include:

1. Interaction between adults and students.
2. Interaction between students.
3. Interaction between colleagues.
4. Interaction between colleagues and others (usually parents)
5. Unpleasant and abusive postings about members.
6. Content critical of the leadership and management of the school but not personally abusive.

The first four categories can be addressed through having robust policies in place that can help prevent situations from arising. Such policies fall into the broader category of 'e-safety' and, more explicitly, an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). In a survey carried out in 2008 Becta found that only 55% of teachers could categorically state that their school had an AUP in place. Consideration should also be given to using disciplinary procedures.

Schools that haven't such a policy in place are advised to view and adopt their Local Authority's policy.

Acceptable Use Policy (AUP)

As recommended by [Becta](#), your school's AUP must cover areas including:

- The types of activities to be conducted on the school computers, by staff and students, including the use of personal and school email addresses and certain websites
- How email and Web content will be filtered and monitored on school computers
- How to deal with incidents of technology misuse, like [cyberbullying](#) or accessing inappropriate content
- The security of school equipment, including passwords and data storage
- Considerations when taking digital photos of students and publishing them online

NAHT advice is that AUP policies should also give clear guidelines about unacceptable uses of social networking.

The Association has also received queries from members who have had parents insisting that the school takes action over content on social networking sites that has been posted out of school hours. This is not something which a school is obliged to take action over. However, there might be circumstances in which wider concerns emerge from such circumstances. For example, those involved could be under the minimum age for participating in such activity or it might have taken place late at night in an unsupervised context. Members may wish to take advice from the local safeguarding team.

Unpleasant and abusive postings about members

It is more difficult for schools to be proactive in the fifth instance. Some members feel that comments posted about them are defamatory and have sought guidance. Members are advised in the first instance to contact their Legal Services department for guidance on this matter. Our research has shown, for example, that some LAs will write to the offending party in such circumstances.

The legal position is complex but does not offer a remedy in the majority of cases. In the case of Facebook, for example, the organisation is based in the USA where the courts generally do not enforce defamation judgements from the UK.

Some members have come to the conclusion, following discussion with Headquarters staff, that they are the victim of attention-seeking behaviour. In such circumstances ignoring the matter may well be the best course of action. There is always the danger, in all circumstances, that pursuing the matter could have the effect of disseminating the content to a wider audience.

There are circumstances in which police involvement is appropriate. These include where postings have a racist element or where violence is threatened or encouraged.

Members who are subjected to having unpleasant comments about them posted on sites are advised to take steps to have them removed. The procedure for different sites is provided below and has been derived from the 'teachtoday.eu website (with the exception of 'Twitter')

FACEBOOK Facebook has changed its procedure since the previous guidance was published. There is now a 'report abuse' button on its pages. However, many members will not be account holders. In this circumstance you are advised to follow this link http://www.facebook.com/help/contact.php?show_form=report_tos_violation You can find [Facebook's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities here](#).

MY SPACE Click on the 'Report Abuse' link at the bottom of every user profile page and other user-generated pages. To report inappropriate images, click on the image and

select the 'Report this Image' option. MySpace also has a dedicated email helpline for school employees at schoolcare@myspace.com. You can find MySpace's [Terms of Use here](#) and [MySpace's Guide for School Administrators here](#).

BEBO Click on the 'Report Abuse' link that is located below the user's profile photo (top left-hand corner of screen) on every Bebo profile page. In addition, you can report specific media content (eg photos, videos and widgets) to the Bebo customer services team by clicking on the 'Report Abuse' link located below the content you wish to report. You can find [Bebo's Terms of Service here](#).

TWITTER The terms of service are not as clear as others regarding abusive comments. There is reference to 'specific threats of violence' and 'You may not use our service for any unlawful purposes' However, there are tight definitions of what constitutes violent threats. To further complicate matters. One needs to be a Twitter member to make a complaint.

YOU TUBE To report an inappropriate video on YouTube, you need to create a free account, log in, then click the 'Flag' link under the video. To report any abuse issues on the site, go to YouTube's [Abuse and Policy Centre](#) where you can choose from a number of options related to inappropriate content, abusive users, video takedowns and privacy issues. You can find [YouTube's Community Guidelines](#) here and its [Terms of Use here](#).

LITTLEGOSSIP This is a relatively new site. Simply googling its name gives an indication of its unsavoury nature. Badged as an opportunity to 'share the latest university and college gossip', the site has much school content. The newspapers have described it as an independent school problem but this is not accurate. Postings are anonymous and are generally malicious, spiteful and salacious and have the potential to cause considerable discord in schools. Members can find out if their school is involved by using the drop down box on the front page. There is evidence that schools will be taken down following contact with the site.

Content critical of the leadership and management of the school but not personally abusive

NAHT guidance in this instance is to contact those responsible for the postings inviting them to address any legitimate concerns about the school via the appropriate and established channels, eg the complaints procedure. It may well be appropriate for the Chair of Governors to consider the matter in the same way as if the comments were made in a face-to-face context.