



Social Media Policy

Policy lead:	Director of People
Last review date:	7 December 2021
Next review date:	7 December 2023
Approval needed by:	Finance and Staffing Committee

Policy Equality Impact Screening

Date of screening: 08 November 2022						
Name of person completing screening: Allan Howells						
	Does this policy have the potential to impact on people in any of the identified groups?		What is the expected impact of this policy on any of the identified groups			Notes
	Yes	No	Positive	Neutral	Negative	
Age		X		X		
Disability		X		X		
Gender Reassignment		X		X		
Race or Ethnicity		X		X		
Religion or Belief		X		X		
Marriage		X		X		
Pregnancy/ Maternity		X		X		
Sex		X		X		
Sexual Orientation		X		X		
Should the policy have a Full Equalities Impact Assessment? No						

Scope

This policy is applicable to all employees of The Learning Alliance and covers all uses of social networking applications which are used privately.

This policy should be read alongside the Trust's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure, Dignity at Work Policy, Acceptable Use Policy and ICT Security Policies and Procedures.

Aims

To support all employees by establishing clear guidelines on the proper use of social media so that:

- the Trust is not exposed to legal challenge;
- the reputation of the Trust is not adversely affected;
- employees do not put themselves in a vulnerable position;
- employees understand how information provided via social networking applications can be representative of the Trust; and
- the use of social media does not impact on the Trust.

Principles

The Trust recognises that many employees make use of social media in a personal capacity and, in the majority of cases, this is uncomplicated and trouble-free. Whilst the Trust respects an employee's right to a private life and has no wish to interfere with this, when using such sites employees must consider the potential impact it could have on their professional position, their own reputation and that of the Trust. The following identifies how an employee's personal life and work life can start to overlap.

- By identifying themselves as employees of the Trust, i.e. adding the Trust name on profiles, the perception of users will be that staff are representative of the Trust. It is therefore important that employees are mindful of the professional standards that are expected of them. Anything posted, including innocent remarks, have the potential to escalate into something that could potentially damage the image and reputation of the Trust, or undermine its work. The originating comment may be traced back to an employee of the Trust and, even if they have not been involved in the latter stages of the comments, they may find themselves subject to a disciplinary investigation.
- Individuals making complaints search the web for information about staff involved in their case – finding social networking sites, blogs and photo galleries that could give fuel to their concerns or help them to identify personal information about them.
- Journalists increasingly use the web to research stories, and may reprint photos or comments that they find.
- Law firms research social networking sites as a matter of course in preparing divorce, private law children's cases and other court proceedings.
- Some organisations also look on social networking sites to find out information about people applying for jobs.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Definition of Social Media

For the purpose of this policy, social media is any type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum. The term social media refers to a number of online networking platforms such as:

- blogs (written, video, podcasts), e.g. WordPress, Blogger, Tumblr;
- micro-blogging websites, e.g. Twitter;
- social networks, e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok;
- forums/message boards;
- online dating sites, e.g. Tinder, Grindr; and
- content-sharing sites, e.g. Flickr, YouTube and Instagram.

Employees should be aware that there are many more examples of social media and this is a constantly changing area. Employees should follow the guidelines outlined in this policy in relation to any social media that they use. Employees should also be aware that content uploaded to social media is not private. Even if you restrict access to friends, there is still the capacity for it to be re-posted and distributed beyond the intended recipients. Therefore, employees using social media should conduct themselves with professionalism and respect. Employees should be aware of both professional and social boundaries and should not therefore accept or invite 'friend' requests from pupils or ex-pupils under the age of 18, or from parents on their personal social media accounts such as Facebook. All communication with parents via social media should be through the school/trust's social media accounts.

Personal Use of Social Media at Work

Employees are not allowed to access social media websites for their personal use from the Trust's computers or devices at any time. This includes laptop/palm-top/hand-held computers or devices (e.g. mobile phones) distributed by the Trust for work purposes.

The Trust understands that employees may wish to use their own computers or devices, such as laptops and palm-top and hand-held devices, to access social media websites while they are at work. However, in accordance with the Trust's current rules and regulations contained in the Staff Handbook, employees are not allowed to access such devices (e.g. mobile phones) for private purposes during working hours (unless there is an emergency). Such devices should always be switched off and stored in a safe place during contact time.

Social Media in a Personal Capacity

The Trust recognises that many employees make use of social media in a personal capacity. However, the employee's online profile, e.g. the name of a blog or a Twitter name, must not contain the Trust's name. Furthermore, while they are not acting on behalf of the Trust, employees must be aware that they can damage the Trust if they are recognised as being one of the Trust's employees.

Any communications that employees make in a personal capacity through social media must not:

a. bring the Trust into disrepute, for example by:

- criticising the Trust;
- criticising or arguing with management, colleagues, children or their families;
- making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations; or
- posting images that are inappropriate, for example, photographs of themselves or colleagues taken at work or links to inappropriate content;

b. breach confidentiality, for example by:

- revealing any information owned by the Trust; or
- giving away confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or child) or an organisation, e.g. the Trust or the Local Authority;

c. abuse their position of trust when working with children/young people, for example by:

- contacting children or their families through social networking sites unless the reason for this contact has been clearly and firmly established by the head teacher, executive principal or chair of governors;

- accepting any requests to become a named friend on a social networking site made by a child/young person; or
- uploading any photographs or video containing images of children/young people for whom the employee holds a position of trust unless in line with the Trust procedures;

d. breach copyright, for example by:

- using someone else's images or written content without permission;
 - failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something;
- or

e. do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, for example by:

- making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age;
- using social media to bully another individual (such as an employee of the Trust);
- using social media to exclude other individuals; or
- posting images that are discriminatory or offensive.

Security and Identity Theft

Employees should be aware that social networking websites are a public forum, particularly if the employee is part of a "network". Employees should not assume that their entries on any website will remain private. Employees should never send abusive or defamatory messages.

Employees must also be security conscious and should take steps to protect themselves from identity theft, for example by restricting the amount of personal information that they give out. Social networking websites allow people to post detailed personal information such as date of birth, place of birth and favourite football team, which can form the basis of security questions and passwords.

In addition, employees should:

- ensure that no information is made available, or referred to, that could provide a person with unauthorised access to the Trust and/or any confidential information;
- inform their manager immediately if they suspect that their personal site has been compromised or accessed by an unauthorised person;
- refrain from recording any confidential information regarding the Trust on any social networking website;
- check their security settings on social networking site so that information is only visible to the people who they want to see it;
- put their name into an internet search engine to see what people can find out about them; and
- help friends and colleagues out by letting them know if they spot things on their pages that might be misconstrued.

Defamatory Statements

Material posted on a site may be defamatory if it contains something about the Trust's employees, partners, children or other individuals that an employee may come into contact with during the course of their work that is not true and undermines the Trust's reputation. For example, photographs or cartoons that may have been doctored to associate the Trust or its employees with a discreditable act.

Libellous statements

Material posted on a site may be considered libellous if it is in permanent form and directly or indirectly clearly identifies the Trust or one of its employees or children with material that damages their reputation.

Employees should always use their own judgment but should bear in mind:

- that information that they share through social networking sites is still subject to copyright, Data Protection, Freedom of Information and Safeguarding legislation;
- the Code of Conduct; and
- other relevant Trust policies (e.g. Dignity at Work, Whistleblowing Procedure, Equality Policy and policies and guidance regarding acceptable use of email, intranet and internet whilst at work).

Disciplinary Action

All employees are required to adhere to this policy. Employees should note that any breaches of this policy may lead to disciplinary action under the Trust's disciplinary procedure. In situations where it becomes known that an employee has posted material to be defamatory or a breach of contract, the employee will be asked to remove the offending material from the social media site immediately.

Serious breaches of this policy, e.g. incidents of bullying of colleagues or social media activity causing serious damage to the Trust, may constitute gross misconduct and could result in dismissal.

Monitoring

Data relating to the operation of this policy will be collated and monitored regularly to ensure that the policy is operating fairly, consistently and effectively. Issues that are identified from the data will be dealt with appropriately.

Equality

The Learning Alliance will ensure that, when implementing this policy, no employee will be disadvantaged on the basis of their gender or transgender, marital status or civil partnership, racial group, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age, disability, pregnancy or maternity, social or economic status or caring responsibility. This means that the guidelines may need to be adjusted to cater for the specific needs of an individual including the provision of information in alternative formats where necessary.

Review

The policy will be reviewed in the light of operating experience and/or changes in legislation.

Useful Links: Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
 Dignity at Work
 ICT Acceptable Use Policy
 Code of Conduct
 Staff Handbook

It is expected that this policy is read on an annual basis and staff indicate this has been actioned.