Social Networking Policy

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Q3 Academy
Social Networking Policy

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Objectives

This policy sets out Q3 Academies' policy on social networking.

New technologies are an integral part of our lives and are powerful tools which open up teaching and learning opportunities for Academy staff in many ways. This document aims to:

- Assist staff working with children to work safely and responsibly with the internet and other communication technologies and to monitor their own standards and practice;
- Set clear expectations of behaviour and/or codes of practice relevant to social networking for educational, personal or recreational use;
- Give a clear message that unlawful or unsafe behaviour is unacceptable and that, where appropriate, disciplinary or legal action will be taken;
- Support safer working practice;
- Minimise the risk of misplaced or malicious allegations made against adults who work with students;
- Reduce the incidence of positions of trust being abused or misused.

Whilst every attempt has been made to cover a wide range of situations, it is recognised that this policy cannot cover all eventualities. There may be times when professional judgements are made in situations not covered by this document, or which directly contravene the standards outlined in this document. It is expected that in these circumstances staff will always advise the Head of School of the justification for any such action already taken or proposed. The Head of School will in turn seek professional advice where appropriate.

This policy takes account of employment legislation and best practice guidelines in relation to social networking in addition to the legal obligations of governing bodies and relevant legislation

2.0 Scope

This document applies to all staff who work in Q3 Academies Trust (QAT), as adopted by the governing body. This includes, but is in no way limited to Learning Consultants, therapists, associate staff, supply staff, governors, examination invigilators, volunteers and contractors.

The principles laid down in the policy should be followed by any adult whose work brings them into contact with students. References to staff should be taken to apply to all the above groups of people in our Academies. Reference to students means any person who attends a premise of the QAT for any reason of an educational nature, including those over the age of 18.

This policy should not be used to address issues where other policies and procedures exist to deal with them. For example, any alleged misconduct which falls within the scope of the Staff Disciplinary Policy & Poor Performance in Community Schools (2004), which requires the Trust to comply with additional child protection requirements as set out in that policy.

3.0 Status

This document does not replace or take priority over the Trust's Safeguarding Policy or the Trust's code of conduct dealing with allegations of abuse, other policies issued around safeguarding or IT issues (e-mail, ICT and data protection policies), but is intended to both supplement and complement any such documents

4.0 Principles

Adults who work with students are responsible for their own actions and behaviour and should avoid any conduct which would lead any responsible person to question their motivation and intentions.

QAT staff should work and be seen to work in an open and transparent way.

QAT staff should continually monitor and review their practice in terms of the continually evolving world of social networking and ensure they follow the guidance contained in this document.

5.0 Safer Social Media Practice in Q3 Academy

5.1 What is social media?

For the purpose of this policy, social media is the term commonly used for websites which allow people to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests. Social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace are perhaps the most well-known examples of social media. The term also covers, but is in no way limited to other web-based services such as blogs, video and audio podcasts, wikis, message boards, photo documents and video sharing websites (such as YouTube). This definition of social media is not exhaustive, as technology develops with new ways of communicating advancing every day.

For the purpose of this document, the terminology Social Media is not exhaustive and also applies to the use of communication technologies such as mobile phones, tablet computers, cameras, PDAs/PSPs or other handheld devices and any other emerging forms of communications technologies.

6.0 Overview and expectations

All adults working with students have a responsibility to maintain public confidence in their ability to safeguard the welfare and best interests of students. It is therefore expected that they will adopt high standards of personal conduct in order to maintain the confidence and respect of their colleagues, students or public in general and all those with whom they work. Adults in contact with students should therefore understand and be aware that safe practice also involves using judgement and integrity about behaviours in places other than the work setting.

The guidance contained in this policy is an attempt to identify what behaviours are expected of QAT staff who work with students. Anyone whose practice deviates from the principles described within this document and/or their professional or employment-related code of conduct may bring into question their suitability to work with children and young people and may result in formal action being taken against them.

QAT staff should always maintain appropriate professional boundaries and avoid behaviour during their use of the internet and other communication technologies, which might be misinterpreted by others. They should report and record any incident with this potential.

7.0 Safer online behaviour

Managing personal information effectively makes it far less likely that information will be misused.

In their own interests, staff need to be aware of the dangers of putting personal information onto social networking sites, such as addresses, home and mobile phone numbers. This will avoid the potential for students or their families or friends having access to staff outside of the Academy/Trust environment. It also reduces the potential for identity theft by third parties.

All staff, particularly new staff, should review their social networking sites when they commence employment to ensure that information available publicly about them is accurate and appropriate. This includes any photographs that may cause embarrassment to themselves or the Trust if they are published outside of the site.

Staff should never 'friend' a student onto their social networking site who attends one of the Academies where they are working for any purpose.

Staff should never use or access the social networking site of students and should never accept an invitation to "friend" a student.

Confidentiality needs to be considered at all times. Social Networking Sites have the potential to discuss inappropriate information and staff need to ensure that they do not put any confidential information on their site about themselves, their employer, their colleagues, students or members of the public.

Employees need to ensure that when they are communicating about others, even outside of work, that they give due regard to the potential for defamation of character. Making allegations on Social Networking Sites (even in their own time and in their own homes) about other employees, students or other individuals connected with the QAT could result in formal action being taken against them. This includes the uploading of photographs which might put the Trust into disrepute.

Staff are also reminded that they must comply with the requirements of equalities legislation in their online communications.

Staff must never post derogatory remarks or offensive comments online or engage in online activities which may bring the QAT into disrepute.

Some social networking sites and other web-based sites have fields in the user profile for job title etc. If you are an employee of the Trust and particularly if you are a Learning Consultant, it is highly recommended that you should not put any information onto the site that could identify either your profession or the Academy where you work. In some circumstances this could damage the reputation of the Academy or the profession.

8.0 Protection of personal information

Staff should ensure that they do not use QAT ICT equipment for personal use, e.g. camera or computers.

Staff should keep their personal phone numbers private and not use their own mobile phones to contact students or parents.

Staff should never share their work usernames or passwords with other people.

Staff should not give their personal e-mail addresses to students or parents. Where there is a need for communication to be sent electronically the Academy e-mail address should be used. Likewise all telephone messages and conversations should take place on the Academy phone System.

Staff should keep a record of their phone's unique international mobile equipment identity (IMEI) number and keep their phone secure whilst on Academy premises.

Staff are advised to understand who is allowed to view the content on their pages of the sites they use and how to restrict access to certain groups of people.

9.0 Communication between students/schools staff

Communication between students and staff, by whatever method, should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries.

This includes the wider use of technology such as mobile phones, text messaging, e-mails, digital cameras, videos, web-cams, websites and blogs.

Staff should not use personal mobile phones to take photographs or record videos of students.

It is the expectation that the QAT should provide a work number and e-mail address for communication between staff and students. Staff should not give their personal mobile numbers or personal e-mail addresses to students or parents.

Staff should not request, or respond to, any personal information from a student, other than that which might be appropriate as part of their professional role.

Staff should ensure that all communications are transparent and open to scrutiny. They should also be careful in their communications with students so as to avoid any possible misinterpretation of their motives or any behaviour which could be construed as "grooming" in the context of sexual offending.

Staff should not give their personal contact details to students including e-mail, home or mobile telephone numbers unless the need to do so is agreed with senior management and parents/carers.

E-mail and text communications between an adult and a student outside agreed protocols may lead to disciplinary and/or criminal investigations. This also includes communications through internet based websites. Internal e-mail systems should only be used in accordance with the Trust's policy.

10.0 Social contact

Staff should not establish or seek to establish social contact via social media/other communication technologies with students for the purpose of securing a friendship or to pursue or strengthen a relationship.

There will be occasions when there are social contacts between students and staff, where for example the parent and member of staff are part of the same social circle, staff transport students (there should always be a second member of staff present) or a staff member provides respite. These contacts however, will be

easily recognised and openly acknowledged. The Academy will organise staffing so that staff who have such contact with students outside Academy do not work within the same class as the student. Staff have a responsibility to make any such contact known to the Senior Leadership Group/Team.

There must be awareness on the part of those working with students that some social networking contacts, especially where these are not common knowledge, can be misconstrued as being part of a grooming process. This can also apply to social networking contacts made through outside interests or through the staff member's own family.

11.0 Access to inappropriate images and internet usage

There are no circumstances that will justify adults possessing indecent images of children. Staff who access and possess links to such websites will be viewed as a significant and potential threat to children. Accessing, making and storing indecent images of children is illegal. This will lead to criminal investigation and the individual being barred from working with children, if proven.

Staff should not use equipment belonging to their Academy/service to access any pornography; neither should personal equipment containing these images or links to them be brought into the workplace. This will raise serious concerns about the suitability of the adult to continue to work with children.

Adults should ensure that students are not exposed to any inappropriate images or web links The Trust and its staff need to ensure that internet equipment used by students have the appropriate controls with regards to access e.g. personal passwords should be kept confidential.

Where indecent images of children are found by staff, the police should be immediately informed. Academies should not attempt to investigate the matter or evaluate the material themselves, as this may lead to evidence being contaminated which in itself can lead to a criminal prosecution.

Where other material is found that is considered to be unsuitable which may not be illegal but which raises concerns about that member of staff, Sandwell Child Protection Unit should be informed and advice sought. The Trust should not attempt to investigate or evaluate the material themselves until such advice is received.

12.0 Cyber bullying

Cyber bullying can be defined as 'the use of modern communication technologies to embarrass, humiliate, threaten or intimidate an individual in the attempt to gain power and control over them."

Prevention activities are key to ensuring that staff are protected from the potential threat of cyber bullying. All employees are reminded of the need to protect themselves from the potential threat of cyber bullying. Following the advice contained in this guidance should reduce the risk of personal information falling into the wrong hands.

If cyber bullying does take place, employees should keep records of the abuse, text, e-mails, website or instant message and should not delete texts or e-mails. Employees are advised to take screen prints of messages or web pages and be careful to record the time, date and place of the site.

Staff may wish to seek the support of their trade union or professional association representatives or another colleague to support them through the process.

Staff are encouraged to report all incidents of cyber bullying to their line manager, Head of School or the CEO. All such incidents will be taken seriously and will be dealt with in consideration of the wishes of the person who has reported the incident. It is for the individual who is being bullied to decide whether they wish to report the actions to the police.

13.0 When the Trust may access your "public presence"

It is within the legitimate interests of the Trust to investigate any potential misuse of social media by its employees or contractors. Should there be a concern, the issue will be reported to one or a combination of the following:

  a) A Line Manager;

  b) The IT Support department, in particular the ICT Network Supervisor or Group IT Manager;

  c) The HR Manager;

  d) The Head of School or CEO.

A visual investigation of the subject's "public" profile (i.e. that which anyone can see or that which a member of the QAT may see). There is **no requirement** for the QAT to take copies of this information and retain it, unless it is inappropriate or a breach of professional standards. A decision on whether this is required rests with a combined decision from at least two of the following:

  a) CEO;

  b) Head of School;

  c) HR Manager;

  d) Group IT Manager.

If staff suspect that there may be inappropriate material, they should either remove the content as soon as possible and inform one of the four parties above.

14.0 Link with other policies

14.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

| QAT ICT Policy | Use of social networking sites which is not in accordance with this policy or the Academy's policies may amount to misconduct or gross misconduct under the Academy's disciplinary policy and procedure. |

QAT Disciplinary Policy and Procedures	Where use of social networking sites can be interpreted to constitute a form of bullying or harassment of another member of staff this may be dealt with under the fairness and dignity at work policy in the first instance.
Equal Opportunities Policy	Use of social networking sites should be at all times in accordance with the Academy's equal opportunities in employment policy.
IRSC Guidance for Safer Working Practice For Adults who work with Children and Young People	This document provides safeguarding guidance for all employees who work with children, young people and also vulnerable adults, including guidance around communication with young people, photography and video.

All employees must adhere to and apply the principles of this policy to their work. Failure to do so may lead to action being taken under the Academy's disciplinary procedure

15.0 Review of Policy

Due to the ever changing nature of information and communication technologies this policy will be reviewed annually and, if necessary, more frequently in response to any significant new developments in the use of technologies, new threats to e-safety or incidents that have taken place.

This policy has been agreed following consultation with the recognised Trade Unions and Professional Associations.