



**Outcomes Focused, Child Centred**

# Northern Education Trust Social Networking Policy

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## **Social Networking Policy**

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 As the employer, Northern Education Trust (NET) recognises the statutory responsibilities related to employment. Throughout the policy it refers to 'nominated officer'. This will usually be the Executive Principal, Principal, Service Director, Line Manager or any officer as nominated by the Chief Executive Officer. In some instances, it will be the Chief Executive Officer as outlined in the Scheme of Delegation.
- 1.2 The Trust is committed to ensuring that all employees are aware of their responsibilities in connection with the growing use of social networking sites. It recognises that the use of such sites has become a very significant part of life for many people. They provide a positive way to keep in touch with friends and colleagues, and can be used to exchange ideas and thoughts on common interests. Examples of such sites include, but are not limited to, blogs (short for web log), Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, SnapChat, YouTube, LinkedIn, forums, bulletin boards, multiplayer online gaming, chatrooms and instant messenger.
- 1.3 The Trust will ensure that all employees are made aware of this policy and any other related ICT protocols. This policy shall be easily accessible to employees and new employees should also be made aware of the policy.
- 1.4 Employees are expected to keep a professional distance from students and there should be a clear separation of the private social lives of employees and those of students. There is no need for social networking to go on between employees and students and should be prohibited. The exception to this would be where an academy uses social networking sites as a communication tool with parents, the community and the wider population. (See para 6.1.14)
- 1.5 It is important that employees are able to use technologies and services effectively and flexibly whilst ensuring that they do not make themselves vulnerable. However, it is also important to ensure that this is balanced with the Trust's duty to safeguard children and the reputation of the Trust and the wider community.

## **2. Who Does This Policy Apply To?**

- 2.1 This policy applies to all employees of the Trust.

## **3. Aims**

- 3.1 The policy aims to:
  - Enable employees to use social networking sites safely and securely.
  - Ensure that employees are aware of the risks associated with the inappropriate use of social networking sites.
  - Safeguard employees in connection with the use of social networking sites and ensure they do not make themselves vulnerable.
  - Ensure the Trust maintains its duty to safeguard children and the reputation of the Trust.

## **4. Legislation**

- 4.1 The following legislation must be considered when adhering to this policy:
  - Human Rights Act 1998

- Data Protection Act 2018
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Computer Misuse Act 1990, amended by the Police and Justice Act 2006

## **5. Responsibilities**

### **5.1 The Trust**

The Trust shall:

- Ensure this policy is implemented and procedures are in place that deal with the use of social networking sites.
- Ensure that all employees have access to this policy and that new employees are made aware of it.

### **5.2 Nominated Officers**

Nominated Officers shall:

- Be familiar with this policy and guidelines and ensure that employees understand the policy and their own responsibilities.
- Ensure that employees are aware of the risks of the use of social networking sites and the possible implications of the inappropriate use of them.
- Instigate disciplinary procedures where appropriate to do so.
- Seek advice where necessary from the Trust HR function on the approach to be adopted if they are made aware of any potential issue.

### **5.3 Employees**

Employees shall

- Behave responsibly and professionally at all times in connection with the use of social networking sites.
- Co-operate with management in ensuring the implementation of this policy.
- If an employee is concerned about something that they read on a social media site, it is their professional responsibility to alert the nominated officer as soon as possible.

### **5.4 The Trust HR Function**

Provide the necessary professional advice and support to the Trust and employees when required

## **6. Use of Social Networking Sites**

- 6.1 For their own security employees' should regularly review their privacy settings on all their social networking sites; however, all communication via social networking sites should be made with the awareness that anything said, shown or received could be made available, intentionally or otherwise, to an audience wider than that originally intended. It is therefore advised that employees follow the following procedures:

- 6.1.1 Employees must not access social networking sites for personal use via Trust information systems or using Trust equipment, including (but not limited to) laptops, smart phones and tablets.
- 6.1.2 Employees must not accept students as friends – personal communication could be considered inappropriate and unprofessional and makes employees vulnerable to allegations.
- 6.1.3 Employees are advised not to be friends with recent students. This has the potential for employees to be compromised in terms of wall content and open to accusations.
- 6.1.4 Employees should not place inappropriate photographs on any social network space.
- 6.1.5 Employees should not post indecent remarks.
- 6.1.6 If an employee receives messages on his/her social networking profile that they think could be from a student, they must report it to their nominated officer and contact the internet service or social networking provider so that they can investigate and take the appropriate action.
- 6.1.7 Employees are advised not to write about their work, but where an employee chooses to do so, he/she should make it clear that the views expressed are his/hers only and do not reflect the views of the Trust. However, all other guidelines in this policy must be adhered to when making any reference to the workplace.
- 6.1.8 Employees must not disclose any information that is confidential to the Trust or disclose personal data or information about any individual/colleague/student, which could be in breach of the Data Protection Act 2018.
- 6.1.9 Employees must not disclose any information about the Trust that is not yet in the public arena.
- 6.1.10 In no circumstances should employees post photographs of students. The exception to this is if an employee's own child(ren) attend a NET Academy. In these circumstances, it is accepted that images of their own children and their friends when at parties or such similar personal events may be posted. Care should be taken to ensure the suitability of the images. Images should not be posted in relation to the Trust.
- 6.1.11 Employees should not make defamatory remarks about the Trust/colleagues/students/parents or post anything that could potentially bring the Trust into disrepute.
- 6.1.12 Employees should not disclose confidential information relating to his/her employment with the Trust.
- 6.1.13 Care should be taken to avoid using language which could be deemed as offensive to others.
- 6.1.14 Where the Trust uses social networking sites for communication purposes; e.g. it has its own Facebook page or Twitter account; these sites can be

accessed via Trust ICT equipment. However, this should be closely monitored and only those with administrator rights should communicate via these sites. Any misuse of the sites by employees, students, parents or the wider community should be reported immediately to the nominated officer.

6.1.15 Social networking activities should not interfere with the employee's primary job responsibilities. The Trust recognises that employees may wish to use their own communication devices such as a mobile phone to access social media while at work. However, employees should limit this use to official rest breaks such as lunchtime.

6.1.16 A Trust email address should not be used when registering in a personal capacity on any social media sites.

## **7. Cyber Bullying**

7.1 Cyber bullying is a form of bullying, harassment or victimisation online. It can happen in a number of ways; inappropriate photographs may be posted, offensive or threatening comments may be made or sensitive personal information could be revealed. This could be done both accidentally or vindictively.

7.2 Cyber bullying in any form will not be tolerated by the Trust.

7.3 Employees who feel they are a victim of cyber bullying should refer to the Trust's Dignity at Work policy for information and guidance. Alternatively, advice can be obtained from the Trust HR Function.

## **8. Breaches of the Policy**

8.1 The Trust does not discourage employees from using social networking sites. However, all employees should be aware that the Trust will take seriously any occasions where the services are used inappropriately. If occasions arise of what could be deemed to be online bullying or harassment, these will be dealt with in the same way as other such instances.

8.2 If any instances of the inappropriate use of social networking sites are brought to the attention of the Trust, depending on the seriousness of the allegations, disciplinary action may be taken.

8.3 There may be instances where the Trust will be obliged to inform the police of any activity or behaviour for which there are concerns as to its legality.

## **9. General Principles Underlying This Policy**

### **9.1 Consistency of Treatment & Fairness**

The Trust is committed to ensuring consistency of treatment and fairness and will abide by all relevant equality legislation.

### **9.2 Confidentiality**

The social networking process will be treated with confidentiality. However, the desire for confidentiality does not override the need for the Trust to quality assure the operation and effectiveness of the policy.

### 9.3 **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Northern Education Trust is committed to monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the Social Networking Policy with recognised Trade Unions, both at national level through the JCC and at local level with Academy representatives.

## CONTACTS

For advice on the content of this policy please contact:

Jude Telford  
Director of Human Resources and Communications  
Northern Education Trust  
[j.telford@northerneducationtrust.org](mailto:j.telford@northerneducationtrust.org)  
Mobile: 07976 044539

Jess Worthington  
HR Manager  
Northern Education Trust  
[j.worthington@northerneducationtrust.org](mailto:j.worthington@northerneducationtrust.org)  
Mobile: 07714 245673

Georgina Taylor  
Senior HR Advisor  
Northern Education Trust  
[g.taylor@northerneducationtrust.org](mailto:g.taylor@northerneducationtrust.org)  
Mobile: 07714 245678

Jo Burnside  
HR Advisor  
Northern Education Trust  
[j.burnside@northerneducationtrust.org](mailto:j.burnside@northerneducationtrust.org)  
Mobile: 07715 671660

Katie Rose  
HR Advisor  
Northern Education Trust  
[k.rose@northerneducationtrust.org](mailto:k.rose@northerneducationtrust.org)  
Mobile: 07715 655495

Employees are also encouraged to contact their trade union representative for advice and support where appropriate.