Social Networking Sites (SNS)

Guidance Note to Staff on the Use of SNS

Revised July 2018

Background

Over the last 10 years there has been a huge increase in the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and of course many Moray Council employees will be among the millions of users across the United Kingdom. For some employees there are specific risks attached to the use of SNS and this guidance is intended to ensure that all Moray Council employees are fully aware of these risks and use SNS in a way which will not comprise the council's position.

Whilst the Moray Council's Computer Use Policy forbids access to personal SNS on council computers, it is clear that there are potential issues which might arise from use of SNS at home or from mobile devices.

With advances in mobile device technology many staff clearly now have the "scope" to access personal SNS at work through their mobile phone but all must be aware that they should not access SNS by this method during working time. Any staff member found to be in breach of this guidance may be subject to the council's disciplinary pProcedures.

Social Networking Sites and Personal Conduct

The council's existing code of conduct provides guidance on the standards of conduct expected of all staff in terms of both their activities within and outwith work. The advent of SNS has made many employees' lives more public, with details of activities and personal views now instantly accessible. As such, staff should be mindful of their responsibilities in this regard. Specifically, staff should be mindful in relation to their use of personal SNS not to: -

- Disclose confidential work related information
- Use the council's intellectual property for example by posting documents or photographs produced in the course of employment or otherwise belonging to the council
- Make statements which may adversely affect the council's interests or reputation
- Criticise or make inappropriate comments in relation to clients; pupils; elected members; the family of clients or pupils; or fellow employees of the Council
- Use defamatory, harassing or disparaging language directed to any aspect of your employment or the council

- Display, or comment inappropriately on content which breaches the law or established moral codes

Social Networking Sites and Recruitment

It is widely recognised that many employers are informally using SNS as a means of assisting in the vetting process for candidates. Whilst the council's recruitment and selection procedures are silent in this regard, this is not an approach that should be adopted within the authority.

The use of such information in these circumstances can potentially lead an employer to challenge from an equalities perspective.

Specific Advice for Employees Working with Young People and/or Vulnerable Adults

For those working with young people and/or protected adults the following specific advice is provided is terms of their use of personal SNS: -

- Do not knowingly accept friend requests from young people and/or protected adults who are in receipt of services from the council ;
- Do not knowingly engage in any communication with young people and/or protected adults through SNS;
- Do not post any content on their profiles which it would be professionally inappropriate for young people and/or protected adults to know or see _or_ they should use the privacy settings of a site to ensure this content is not accessible to young people and/or protected adults;
- Do lead by example, and abide by all the relevant safety messages and guidance provided to young people and/or protected adults
- Staff should know how to record and report any concerns about young people/protected adult's safety which is raised by SNS to their line managers or, where relevant, how to escalate any child protection concerns to the relevant party.

- In some circumstances groups have been established by staff who have corporate social media accounts, to engage with clients within their particular area of work. This can be a very effective way of maintaining contact and imparting information, but must be a 'closed' group (i.e. by invitation only) and used securely.

Please see attached appendix which provides further advice issued by the EIS specifically for teachers (Appendix 1).

Any member of staff who wishes to clarify or discuss their responsibilities with regards to the use of SNS are encouraged to seek advice from Personnel Services through the Personnel Advice Line on 01343 563261.

Further Guidance for Teachers

The use of new technologies raises a number of issues for teachers. It is recognised that the new technologies can assist teachers. Many teachers will also use social networks such as Facebook in their private lives, however, and may be approached by pupils or students through social networks.

The EIS is aware that this is an evolving area and, while the EIS supports and welcomes developments in media literacy, there are both potential benefits and risks for members in the use of new technologies.

The General Teaching Council Scotland has issued a Code of Professionalism and Conduct which states:

As a teacher you must:

- not discuss your own private and personal relationships with pupils and be mindful to maintain an appropriate balance between formality and informality when dealing with pupils;
- take care to avoid becoming personally involved in pupils' personal affairs;
- be aware of the potential dangers of being alone with a pupil in a private or isolated situation, avoiding circumstances which are or could be perceived to be of an inappropriate nature. This also is the case in connection with social networking websites, outwith the school/college setting and in subjects such as music, PE and drama.

The following questions & answers provide further specific advice to all members in the use of SNS.

Q. **Should I accept students as 'friends' on social network sites**?

No. You should not accept current pupils or students in a school as 'Contacts' or 'Friends' on social networks or photo-sharing sites and this would include offering of access to 'limited profiles'. Giving access to personal information on full and limited profiles opens up the risk of inadvertently offering access to 'friends of friends', or contacts you do not know, and increases the risk of identity theft if you give information across a range of sites.

Only accept 'Friends' who are colleagues or personal adult friends, while always being aware that you have no control over the friendships or material they are publishing.

Teachers should not contact students for learning related work through Social Network sites. In the rare occasion where they may wish to do so, e.g. during student absence, they may use the tools in Glow. On Glow, interactions are recorded for your safety, except for video. Use video discussions in the same way as you would conduct face to face meetings in the school premises (are you in the 'room' alone or with other students and/or staff?)

Q. **What do I do if I receive repeated requests from students to become 'Friends'?**

Be firm. This type of request is inappropriate. You should reply with a clear rejection, maybe along the lines of: "I use this social network for my personal life and keeping in touch with old friends. If you need to see me about work then contact me at school or when I'm logged into Glow". If the student persists you should raise the issue with a manager.

Q. **Why should I not set up a group on a Social Network Site for my students?**

While this might seem like a better idea for 'separating' school and personal life, you are still open to the risks associated with befriending students on your own personal profile. Also, you are providing a focus for potential online predators, by grouping young people from a particular geographical area in one online venue. In any case you should always be mindful of school and authority policies.

Q. **What about setting up a specific 'school' Social Networking Site account?**

If you were to do this, then you must seek approval from your head teacher and even your local authority. There's no guarantee that 'students' are who they say they are and, as above, you are providing a focus for potential on line predators looking for a geographical area.

Q. **What about publishing my learning log?**

Everything on a learning log is in the public domain. Some teachers publish learning logs, for example, in a blog and this practice can develop confidence and pedagogy. There are some ways to reduce the potential for damage to your image and that of your school, and some guidance that will help you get the most out of this medium:

(i)   Be prepared for others to leave comments on your blog or personal profile. Be prepared for others posting critical comments. Be aware that creating libellous claims on your personal page may make you

and potentially your employer liable. Ensure your contributions are both accurate and measured.

(ii)   Be respectful of your colleagues – you have an obligation to your employer and your employer is entitled to expect you not to make public critical comments. If you have a grievance, follow the normal routes.

Other guidelines, in more detail, were drawn up by LTS and East Lothian Council for their employees and users of its 'eduBuzz' blogging system. This provides a helpful source of how blogs can be managed responsibly.

Remember you are bound by the GTCS Code of Professionalism and Conduct.

Q. **I am about to enter teaching and have a current personal profile. What should I do?**

Many probationer teachers or students in training currently have personal sites. Any new teacher should audit their personal profile and re-evaluate the information and who should have access to the information. It is better to remove the material before entering schools.

If you have "friends" in the community in which you teach you should recognise that you may teach siblings of these friends and that they may get personal information about you. It is better to avoid such risks by either editing your profile or removing it.

30th March 2011

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