

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Misuse of communication technologies may lead to criminal or civil actions in accordance with the Laws of Malta.

Educators are to conduct themselves in a manner that is becoming to the profession at all times and in all contexts. Misuse of communication technologies by educators may raise questions about their professional conduct and moral character. Steps may be taken to address any misuse of communication technologies by educators, and this in accordance with regulations that may be in force from time to time.

You are invited to forward any feedback you may have at <https://bit.ly/2FrjJXi> by the 15th of January, 2019.

For more information, updates, resources and useful links, please visit our website at www.besmartonline.org.mt or follow us on Facebook.

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DRAFT CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

GUIDELINES FOR EDUCATORS

ON THE APPROPRIATE USE
OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION
AND SOCIAL MEDIA



MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

RATIONALE

Electronic communication and social media create new opportunities for extending and enhancing education. The use of social media brings also responsibilities for all, and even more so for educators.

Maintaining professional boundaries in all forms of communication, technology-related or not, is vital to maintaining the public trust and appropriate professional relationships.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Teacher's Code of Ethics and Practice and the OPM circular no. 21/2015 since the same principles apply. These guidelines are intended to help all educators to use their professional judgment to ensure that their online behaviour respects the teaching profession.

Educator for the sake of these guidelines refers to all those who are in contact with students.

INTRODUCTION

Electronic communication and social media tools provide exciting opportunities to learn, teach, create and communicate. They serve a range of purposes from helping learners and parents access educational materials to connecting with friends and family and provide access to communities of practices, interests and groups all over the world.

Educators can also use the internet and social networking sites as instructional tools or to seek resources to develop lesson plans and information to enhance their professional practice. These tools provide powerful new ways for educators to collaborate and dialogue with others, expand their professional network and continue their professional learning.

The social media and electronic communication however offers great challenges as the boundary between educators, students and parents or/and caregivers can quickly become blurred.

Educators are vested by the society with trust and responsibility, together with an expectation that they will care for and assist students throughout their educational journey in the broadest sense. Educators therefore need to be aware of the risk that actions which might, on the face of it, seem quite innocent, be misunderstood and misconstrued by others.

The principles guiding these guidelines are the following:

- Maintain trust in the profession
- Maintain professional relationships with learners
- Respect the uniqueness and diversity of learners
- Work in a collaborative manner with colleagues, parents, guardians and carers
- Act with honesty and integrity
- Keep their professional knowledge and practice up to date

HOW CAN EDUCATORS MINIMISE RISK WHEN USING ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL NETWORKING?

Educators should:

- only use official channels of communication e.g. work e-mail addresses when communicating with students and parents;
- always maintain a formal and courteous and professional tone in communicating with students and ensure that professional boundaries are maintained;
- be careful not to exchange private text, phone numbers, personal e-mail addresses or photos of a personal nature with students and parents;
- decline learner-initiated 'friend' requests from students one teaches or/and attend the school one teaches in, are on internet based social media sites and networks and do not instigate such requests themselves;
- use discretion when dealing with friend requests from parents and/or carers. It is acceptable to decline these invitations and remind parents and/or carers of more formal channels which they can discuss their child's education;
- behave online in a way in which does not call into question your position as a professional;
- manage one's privacy setting and keep them under review. These are particularly important in regard to photos;
- remember that no privacy mechanism is 100% guaranteed;
- ensure one's settings prohibit others from tagging you in any photos or updates without one's permission;
- ask others to remove any undesirable content one deems should be removed;
- consider that conversations held online may not be private;
- be aware of who may have access to what one posts;
- assume that information one posts could be accessed and altered;
- not discuss students, colleagues, parents or carers online or criticise one's employer or others within the school community;
- respect pupil privacy and confidentiality at all times.