

## **COMMUNICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL MEDIA) POLICY**

### **1. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY**

- 1.1 The GDST respects the right of staff to a private life and the intention of this policy is to support that right. The GDST recognises that the overwhelming majority of staff act appropriately, including when online or using social media.
- 1.2 This policy, along with other relevant GDST policies such as the ICT Acceptable Use Agreement, intends to ensure that staff understand the GDST's expectations in issues of communication and in connection with how they use social media, both at work and outside.
- 1.3 This policy aims to provide a framework for staff when communicating in general and when using social media in order to encourage its effective use and at the same time ensure that the GDST and our schools' reputations are protected. We recognise that communication may take place in a number of settings, for example in a one-to-one conversation where staff are liable to be overheard; however, this policy particularly focuses on online communications and social media as these interactions are easy to store, manipulate and disseminate beyond the intended audience(s).
- 1.4 This policy also aims to ensure that staff are protected while using social media and they feel empowered to contribute positively to collaborative online activity and other communications.
- 1.5 This policy covers both the professional and personal use of social media communications and use which might apply generally. Staff should refer to the relevant sections depending on their role and their particular use of social media.

### **2. SCOPE**

- 2.1 This policy deals with all forms of communication including those using social media. It extends to text messaging, emails, voice mails and instant messaging.
- 2.2 Social media is defined as any interactive online media that allows people to communicate with each other or to share ideas, opinions or data. This includes, but is not limited to, social forums such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, covers blogs and video- and image-sharing websites such as YouTube, Google+, WhatsApp and Instagram, and includes all other social networking sites and internet postings. It includes taking part in discussions on web forums or message boards and providing reviews on business or customer review websites.
- 2.3 Staff should be aware that there are many more examples of types of communication and social media than can be listed in this policy and this is a constantly changing area. Staff

should follow these guidelines in relation to any method of communication that they use, even if it is not specifically named in this policy.

2.4 This policy applies to communications relating to the GDST or our schools as well as personal communications that may affect GDST's business in any way.

2.5 This policy and procedure applies to all employees of the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST).

2.6 This policy does not form part of the contract of employment and may be amended from time to time as appropriate, following due consultation with employee representatives.

### **3. COMPLIANCE WITH RELATED POLICIES AND AGREEMENTS**

Communications including via social media should be used in a way that supports the GDST's other policies and the responsibilities of staff set out in other policies and relevant Agreements and Regulations remain in force. Specifically:

- i. the GDST and the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Procedures
- ii. the GDST ICT Acceptable Use Agreement;
- iii. the GDST's obligations with respect to the rules of relevant regulatory bodies;
- iv. any obligations contained in GDST policies which relate to confidentiality;
- v. the GDST's Disciplinary Policy and Procedure;
- vi. the duty not to harass or bully other staff in any way **OR** otherwise breach the Dignity at Work Policy;
- vii. The duty not to discriminate unlawfully against other staff or third parties **OR** breach the GDST's Equal Opportunities Policy;
- viii. the GDST's Data Protection Policy; or
- ix. the duty not to breach any other laws or regulatory requirements, such as copyright.

### **4. PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS DURING WORK TIME**

Occasional personal use of social media, including the use of the internet and email, during working hours is permitted so long as it does not involve unprofessional or inappropriate conduct or content, does not interfere with work responsibilities or productivity and complies with this policy. In particular, staff should not send personal text messages or emails or browse the internet for personal reasons during teaching time, except in an emergency.

### **5. PROHIBITED USE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

5.1 Staff must avoid making any postings, links or other communications that could damage the GDST's educational or business interests or reputation, even indirectly, including on personal accounts. (For example: staff must not criticise or argue with parents or post links to inappropriate content.)

5.2 Staff must not engage with pupils using personal social media channels. (For example, staff must not become Facebook friends with current pupils on personal accounts.)

5.3 Staff must not use digital communications or social media to defame or criticise the GDST or any of its schools, its pupils, staff, parents or any third party; to harass, bully or

unlawfully discriminate against pupils, staff or third parties; to make false or misleading statements; or to impersonate colleagues or third parties. (For example, staff must not make offensive comments relating to sex, age, race, disability; use social media to bully a colleague; or post offensive or discriminatory images.) If staff find themselves subject to such harassment or bullying by a colleague, they should report the matter using the appropriate GDST procedure.

5.4 Staff must not express opinions on behalf of the GDST or any of its schools via digital communications or social media, unless expressly allowed to do so by a Head, Director or authorised manager, and if so, where possible using a GDST account.

5.5 Staff must not post comments or do anything that jeopardises business confidential information and intellectual property such as sensitive information about the GDST's pupils, staff, educational or business performance. (For example, staff must not discuss a school or office's internal workings in detail or provide a breakdown of pupil numbers in a way which might be damaging to the GDST.)

## **6. SCHOOL OR ORGANISATIONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

6.1 The GDST encourages staff to make positive use of social media as part of their work.

6.2 Staff must be aware at all times that, if contributing to a school's or the GDST's social media activities, they are representing the organisation.

6.3 If a member of staff's duties require them to speak on behalf of a GDST school or the GDST in a social media environment, approval must be sought for such communication from the relevant manager, Head or Director, who may impose certain requirements and restrictions with regard to the social media activities.

6.4 Likewise, if staff are contacted for comments about a school or the GDST for publication anywhere, including in any social media outlet, the enquiry must be directed to the school's Director of Marketing and Communications and/or the Head, or the Director of Communications at Trust Office. Staff are not permitted to respond to any such requests without prior approval.

6.5 The use of social media for school or business purposes is subject to the remainder of this policy.

## **7. GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR RESPONSIBLE USE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

**Staff are reminded that their online conduct including on social media is subject to those expectations set out in the GDST ICT Acceptable Use Agreement. This sets out expectations of staff who are also parents of pupils at a GDST school.** Additionally and specifically:

7.1 Staff should be respectful to others when making any statement on social media and be aware that they are personally responsible for all communications which will be published

on the internet for anyone to see. Staff are reminded of their privacy settings in this respect.

- 7.2 If staff choose to write or speak about their work even without identifying their connection with the GDST or a school, it may still be possible for people to work out their employer's identity. Staff should be conscious of their duty as employees to act professionally and in good faith. Staff should be aware that even if they are not acting on behalf of the GDST, they can damage the organisation if they act inappropriately and are recognisable as being an employee.
- 7.3 If staff discuss their work on social media (for example, giving opinions on their specialism or their job) or disclose their connection with the GDST on their profiles or in any social media postings, they must state either on their personal profile or in social media postings, that their views do not represent those of the GDST or any of its schools (unless they are authorised to speak on behalf of the GDST as set out in the relevant paragraph above). They are advised to use a statement that makes it clear that their personal views do not necessarily reflect the views of the GDST. A statement such as 'these views are my own' would suffice.
- 7.4 Even if staff do not discuss work or disclose their connection with the GDST, they should ensure that their personal profile and any content posted in a personal context are consistent with the professional image they present to pupils, parents, colleagues and any third parties. This is because it may be relatively easy for them to be identified as a GDST employee even if this is not expressly stated.
- 7.5 Staff should ensure that their interactions online and particularly on social media sites do not damage working relationships with colleagues, pupils, parents and anyone else associated with the GDST.
- 7.6 Staff should ensure that no information is made available that could provide a person with unauthorised access to GDST systems and/or any confidential information.
- 7.7 If there is any uncertainty or concern about the appropriateness of any statement or posting, it is sensible not to post it until it has been discussed with the line manager, Head or Director.
- 7.8 If a member of staff notices any online or social media content that criticises or reflects poorly on the GDST or any of its schools, whether from colleagues or other individuals or organisations, they should contact their line manager, Head or Director.
- 7.9 Staff may provide endorsements for other individuals on social or professional networking sites, as long as they are accurate, genuine and fair. Staff may endorse products and companies or organisations in a professional capacity only with the express permission of their manager or Head.

## 8. RECRUITMENT

We may use internet searches to perform due diligence on candidates in the course of recruitment. Where we do this, we will act in accordance with our data protection and equal opportunities obligations and policy.

## 9. BREACH OF THIS POLICY

9.1 Breach of this policy will be dealt with under the GDST's disciplinary policy. Any member of staff suspected of committing a breach of this communications policy will be required to co-operate with an internal investigation. Any information contained online or on social networking websites may be used in evidence, if relevant, to any disciplinary proceedings.

9.2 Staff may be required to remove any online content that the GDST considers to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in disciplinary action.

9.3 The GDST may deny access to any website to any member of staff, although in such cases will endeavour to give reasons for doing so. Monitoring of access to online activity including social networking websites will follow the GDST's general monitoring policy for internet usage.

## 10. DOCUMENT CONTROL AND RELEVANT INFORMATION

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