

## **Don't let Facebook harm your career** - Fiona Salvage 3/1/2013

It's all fun and games until someone gets hurt. So don't expose your private life to public humiliation, take precautions with your online exploits

It could happen to anyone, anytime. A photo is put up on a social network, it's tagged with your name, the privacy settings aren't as strict as they could be and there you are: on a typically lively student night out, in provocative fancy dress, a bit tipsy, and for all the world to see. Harmless fun? Hardly.

Social media networks like Facebook and Twitter are growing in popularity with over 500 million active users, but it's not all jolly japes and larks for everyone. The teaching profession is in the public eye and several teachers are finding that Facebook is revealing much more about them than they'd expected. In the past year there's been a steady stream of tabloid stories about teachers whose Facebook posts and photos have got them into professional problems. Pupils with time on their hands and unrestricted access to the internet are dredging up photos of teachers enjoying a private life.

But what about trainee teachers who are currently searching for a job; does this really affect you? Quite simply, the answer is yes.

### **Can Facebook harm your job prospects?**

Keziah Featherstone, deputy head at The Coleshill School, Warwickshire is an experienced teacher, and has this advice: "I've never searched for a potential employee before interviewing but I know some places do. We have accessed Facebook material, and other social network data on a couple of occasions, though, when we have had safeguarding issues raised.

"My advice to anyone in education is to remember the kids will Google/Bing/Facebook/MySpace you and if there is something there that might even be a little bit embarrassing then parents will see it too – then the headteacher. Set all your security levels to high but also remember something might get through. I've had some tough conversations with people about even the most innocent of pictures: naked male torsos following an Iron Man competition can seem a bit seedy when sent around Year 9 girls' MSN accounts. And this is something that happens frequently in schools. And never, ever, become "friends" with a student or a parent on Facebook."

A joint Association of Teachers and Lecturers and Teacher Support Network survey reveals nearly a quarter of education staff said they, or a colleague, have been told by an employer to remove something from a social networking site. ATL also warns that there's a 'growing trend' for schools to use these sites to search for information on job applicants.

### **Staying safe**

The best place to start is by Googling your name. Trawl through the links that Google finds and consider each one as if you were an employer – ask yourself are you creating a good impression.

Ken McAdam, the lead for member advice at ATL, advises you: "Check any information you've posted on a social networking site like Facebook and make sure that information can't be used against you. If you have made comments or if there are photos of you that could be deemed inappropriate then you need to think if a potential employer were to access these would I be compromising my career? If there's any doubt about this then you should refresh those images or comments accordingly."

Above all, this is all a matter for common sense, says Mr McAdam, "using privacy settings

appropriately, not posting offensive comments, or comments that can be misconstrued, should help you keep your private life private.”

### **Watch what your friends post**

Even if you’ve been careful with your privacy settings, have never used bad language on status updates and only upload photos of your cat, other Facebook users could still get you into hot water. What should you do then? Mr McAdam’s advice is, “If you find out that a compromising photo of you is on someone else’s profile, you should attempt to get the photograph either removed or amended. If you are aware of it, then you should be reasonably expected to, for your own sake and for a potential employer, to say ‘I am aware of that and I have tried to make contact with the site holder to see if I can have that content amended and here is a copy of my attempts to do so’.”

### **It doesn’t end once you’ve got a job**

Once you’ve secured a position in a school you still can’t let your guard down. Pupils will be curious about a new teacher and may well Google you or try to find you on Facebook, so it’s prudent to continue being careful with your posts and photos.

When you start at your new school, you should also familiarize yourself with their IT policy. This should cover how social networking sites can be used in an educational context and what is considered to be appropriate contact with students online.

Facebook is a valuable tool for keeping in touch with family and friends around the world. Using it wisely will help to ensure what seems to be harmless fun doesn’t harm your career.

### **Advice from ATL**

- Use the Facebook privacy setting ‘only friends’ for posting updates and uploading photos.
- Follow the Privacy link at the bottom of every Facebook page and edit your settings to keep your information within your network of ‘friends’.
- Settings such as ‘friends of friends’ and ‘networks and friends’ can open your content to a wider audience and compromise your privacy.
- ‘Untag’ yourself from photos on friends’ pages if they could be considered inappropriate.
- Don’t post comments that could be considered defamatory or in breach of copyright legislation.
- Regularly check your profile to ensure it is free from inappropriate comments and/or images.

### **Read more about social media and teachers**

Be smart when it comes to using social media

### **Other sources of advice**

[ATL factsheet on how to protect yourself on the internet](#)

[ATL advice on how to protect yourself on the Internet](#)

[Teacher Support Network factsheet with advice on Facebook privacy settings](#)

[Cyberbullying and online safety factsheet from the Teacher Support Network](#)

[Twelve ways to protect your online privacy from the Electronic Frontier Foundation Group](#)