

AVOIDING PITFALLS

for teachers and school leaders



QUEENSLAND
TEACHERS' UNION
OF EMPLOYEES
EST 1889

(including code of conduct and student protection)



pullout to keep or pin up

Know the Standard of Practice

The Standard of Practice provides advice and guidance for employees in making ethical decisions, especially in circumstances where the "correct" or "best" course of action may not be clear. It is aligned to the Queensland Public Service Code of Conduct. The standard does not cover every possible scenario but provides further guidance on the intention of the four ethics principles:

- integrity and impartiality
- promoting the public good
- commitment to the system of government
- accountability and transparency.

Complete all relevant training and use the REFLECT model for ethical decision-making provided by DET.

Ignorance is not an excuse for non-compliance with the Standard of Practice!

Be proactive and transparent

- Accurately follow proper processes and procedures.
- If unsure, speak with your line manager, principal, or contact the Queensland Teachers' Union.
- Use DET's REFLECT model for ethical decision-making.
- If something occurs, e.g. you hit a student in the face, go speak with your principal, write up the incident on OneSchool, and if need be phone the student's parent.
- When in doubt, speak out.

Develop low risk strategies

Behaviour can be categorised into LOW RISK and HIGH RISK. There is a spectrum. High risk behaviours do not necessarily indicate wrongdoing, however there is a greater chance of the behaviour being perceived as inappropriate, leading to a breach of the code of conduct. With low risk behaviour there is less chance of the intent of your actions being misinterpreted.

Conflict of interest - secondary employment

Other secondary employment can be seen as a conflict of interest. If engaged in concurrent employment, you have an ethical obligation to ensure that your ability to fulfil your duties with your primary employment is not adversely affected and that the integrity of the department is not compromised. You must also ensure that you do not use your position as a public official, or any public resource, facilities or intellectual property, to advise, promote or benefit your private interests, either financially or in kind. For instance, a person cannot teach dance or music privately and have posters advertising this up at school.

Fill in the "Notification of other employment form" from the department website and submit to the principal for validation.

Being professional

As an employee of the department, you are required to demonstrate a high standard of workplace behaviour and personal conduct. Maintain professional relationships and communicate appropriately with you colleagues.

This includes:

- fitness for duty – do not be adversely effected by alcohol, drugs and medication
- behaving and responding appropriately in conflict situations
- not behaving in a way that can be seen as bullying or harassment, e.g. spreading rumours and gossiping, in person or through emails and texts
- performing your duties competently and responsively.

Treat co-workers with dignity and respect, and tolerate the views of others.

Student relationships

Contact with students beyond professional, school-related activities can be risky for teachers. That is why it is so important to ensure that you do not cross professional boundaries through contact with a student which is improper, or open to being interpreted as improper. Always remain vigilant; make sure any conversations you have with those in your care remain purely professional.

Interactions with students - Electronic devices

In today's world, vigilance has to be extended to the field of telecommunications, including mobile phones, email and electronic social networks. Many educators use these networks, but it is vital that you are careful of how you use them to communicate with students.

These include:

- social media sites, such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and any other virtual community or network
- electronic communication, including blogs, podcasts, internet forums, photographs or pictures, video etc
- technologies such as blogging, wall-posting, music-sharing, crowdsourcing etc.

This list is not exhaustive and will be fluid depending on advances in technology.

Private social media accounts

For many teachers, Facebook is seen as a valuable educational tool and an integral part of their private social interaction. However, the privacy and professional risks for teachers are potentially high. Teachers often have the mistaken belief that their social networking sites are personal websites, which allow them freedom over the material they post online. However, the reality is that these sites are very public spaces which leave an internet footprint that can have serious, albeit unintended, consequences for teachers who breach professional codes of conduct and education laws. Teachers face the risk of censured speech, professional misconduct and possible dismissal for posting inappropriate information, including comments and pictures on this website.

Do not:

- use social networks to contact or access students presently enrolled in any school or institute
- post material that can be considered threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory or disparaging towards another employee
- imply you are authorised to speak on behalf of DET or that you are expressing its views
- disclose or use any confidential or personal information obtained in your capacity as an employee
- make posts that could be interpreted as reflecting negligence in your duties.

To protect yourself:

- keep all profiles set at the highest privacy setting permitted by the website, but do not rely on privacy settings.

- be mindful of the content, especially when it comes to photographs.
- keep "friends" to people you know.

Mobile

- You must not communicate with students using a personal mobile phone, either verbally or via text message, unless prior approval has been given by your principal or supervisor.
- Use of a departmental mobile phone must be for official purposes only.
- Do not use personal cameras or mobile phones to photograph students unless prior approval has been given by your principal or supervisor.
- The use of personal or school mobile phones or cameras to photograph students must be for official purposes only. Parental or custodial approval must be given for the publication of photographs of students.
- Do not use on playground duty.

Email

- You must ensure that you do not communicate with students from a private or personal email address.
- Communication with students via departmental email should be for official purposes only.
- Treat co-workers with dignity and respect, and tolerate the views of others, which may differ from your own.
- Avoid any behaviour which may be discriminatory or harassing in nature.

Computers

The department has the ability to check use of departmental devices, e.g. computers, laptops etc. in terms of search history, emails etc. This includes deleted material, internet searches and files.

Only limited and reasonable personal use of the departmental ICT network is permitted. It must be infrequent and brief, generally occurring during personal time (e.g. lunch break) and should not interfere with your work. Examples of reasonable use are:

- online banking
- accessing online media sites
- brief personal email using appropriate content.

Inappropriate use is:

- private business dealings
- use that would breach regulations or legislation
- accessing inappropriate material.

Teachers often have the mistaken belief that social networking sites allow them freedom over the material they post online!

Report student protection matters in line with the policy

School staff members have mandatory reporting obligations under both the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 (EGPA) and the Child Protection Act 1999 (CPA).

All alleged student harm matters involving an employee should be managed in accordance with the department's procedure "Allegations against employees in the area of student protection" and student protection procedures.

All other alleged student harm not relating to employees should be managed in accordance with the student protection procedure.

Use departmental resources for official purposes only

Unauthorised use of departmental resources, misuse of the corporate card, and nepotism can all be seen as fraud and corruption. DET has a zero tolerance policy toward this and you are potentially liable to be dismissed and/or prosecuted for criminal offences.

DET has a policy on the appropriate and ethical use of public resources, as well as a set of guidelines. There is also a catering and hospitality procedure and accompanying guidelines.

DET has a ZERO tolerance policy towards this!

Information accurate as of November 2017.
Questions? Contact QTAD online at www.qtu.asn.au/qtad or call 1300 11 7823.