



A teacher's guide to managing your professional online reputation

As a teacher, what you say and do online and what others say about you can have a major impact on your professional reputation. It can also influence decisions that people make about you, for good, or for bad. This is why what you post online and how you respond to what others post about you is really important.

This guide offers tips on how to manage your online reputation, including how to get advice and support if and when you need it.

What is my online reputation?

Your online reputation is the opinion and perception that people have of you when they come across you online. This could be through something you've posted, like a blog on your school/college website, a photo, or any comments you make. Or, it could be through something someone has said or posted about you. This could be from a learner, a colleague, a parent/carer, or even someone you don't know professionally, like a friend or family member. It could also be via your own social media profiles or your website, if you have one.

Every reference or instance of you online contributes to what's called your digital footprint.

How can I manage my online reputation?

Managing your professional reputation online involves taking care about what you post, and how you respond to posts about you, especially any negative ones. Getting a handle on what information is already available about you, is a good place to start.



Understand your digital footprint

You can find your digital footprint just by doing a search of yourself, using Google or another internet search engine. This is the information that any future employer, colleague, parent/carer or learner will see if they do the same.

Once you have done that, there are a range of tools available to help you keep track of your online reputation, including [Google Alerts](#) which will notify you of any new online activity related to your personal information, such as your name.

Protect access to your content

You can apply a certain amount of control over what information about you is available online and what comes up in an internet search. The following practical steps will go a long way to implementing clear boundaries about what you make public and what you keep private.

- **Check your social media privacy settings.** Be clear about who can see your social media profiles (like Facebook or Instagram, for example). Social media companies are very good at connecting people. Often the contacts in your phone are shared with these companies who then try and connect you with those people. If this is an issue the [Social media checklists](#) giving hints and tips are available on Hwb.
- **Is your account professional or personal?** Make a decision about the account is it personal, professional or both? Be clear, open and honest in your bio, or profile. Don't forget you could use LinkedIn to build your professional network.
- **Don't overlook your profile picture.** Profile pictures across all social networks are never private. Be sure your profile picture shows you in a positive way. Ensure there's no personal information or inappropriate content.
- **Protect your passwords.** Never share your password details, so the only person who can access your social media profiles etc. is you.
- **Manage your list of friends.** Consider reviewing who you are connected with online and do this on a regular basis.
- **Talk to friends and family.** Let them know what you're comfortable with them sharing about you online. For example, are you happy to be tagged in a photo?
- **Limit your online information in Google searches.** If you discover sensitive personal information online that you can't remove yourself (such as a sensitive photo that's been shared without your consent), you can ask Google to remove this. You can check what Google is willing to remove [here](#).



Friending parents/carers and learners on social media

Sometimes it can be difficult not to be friends with some people. In smaller schools/colleges in rural areas, there are often a lot of parents/carers who are already friends with teachers before their child joins the school/college. In a larger school/college in a city setting, this may be less likely.

Your school should have a social media policy in place which is worth consulting in the first instance. If your intended use is in line with school/college policies, and you're happy for parents/carers to see what you share online, it's down to your personal discretion. The Welsh Government is aware of some of the challenges social media presents for practitioners. SWGfL, as part of their contract with the Welsh Government, has produced a range of [template policies, freely available on Hwb](#).

It's a different situation being friends with learners on social media. There needs to be a certain amount of professional distance between teachers and learners. Being friends with a child or young person could blur these boundaries.

It's worth considering what kind of issues it could cause if one of your learners starts messaging you or tagging you in posts on social media. This could cause concern among other parents/carers and teachers, and make your life at school/college quite challenging.

If you're looking for a way to collaborate with learners on a school/college project, there are other, more suitable virtual learning environments dedicated to education.

Take care about what you post online

Your social media accounts are yours and what you do with them is up to you. However, if you engage with anyone from the school community using your personal social media channels remember that you are also, in this context, representing the school, so here are a few points to consider.

- What does this post say about you?
- If it's text, is it grammatically correct and with the correct spelling?
- Are you using appropriate language and behaviour?
- If it's an image, does it portray you in a positive professional light?
- If it's referring to someone else, e.g. a colleague, is it positive?
- Does it comply with your school/college's policies and procedures?

Take care how you respond to posts about you online

You have no control over what people say or post about you online. But you do have control over how you respond. And, in fact, a professional response can say more about you than the original post. If you are going to respond to a comment, always be polite and professional.



What to do if someone posts negative content about you online

You should always be very careful when assessing negative comments online. A simple rule is never respond online immediately. Instead, take time to consider a response and to seek advice.

The **Professionals Online Safety Helpline** can help with issues concerning your reputation as well as with a range of other online safety issues. They have fast-track access to social networking providers and can mediate on your behalf, where necessary. Call 0344 381 4772 or email helpline@saferinternet.org.uk.

