

ONIONS & FERDINAND: LASERING THE DIGITAL TATTOO: HOW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEADTEACHER AND NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE PRESENCE MAY AFFECT EMPLOYABILITY

Lasering the Digital Tattoo: How differences between headteacher and newly qualified teacher perspectives on online presence may affect employability

Teacher Education Advancement
Network Journal
Copyright © 2021
University of Cumbria
Vol 13(1) pages 54-65

Sian Onions and Matt Ferdinand
Edge Hill University

Abstract

It is widely recognised that technology, including social media, has many positive benefits in education although online technologies, particularly imprudent use of social networking sites, may also present problems for those seeking employment as a newly qualified teacher (NQT). To counter this, trainee teachers are provided with guidance on the use of social media however, it could be argued that the perceptions surrounding appropriate use of technology and social media are subjective and different stakeholders may hold a range of views regarding what is and what is not acceptable. This study aims to investigate differences in the values and attitudes of trainee teachers at the point of seeking employment in relation to those of head teachers as employers. The potential for a mismatch between these views and the subsequent negative outcomes for trainees is clear and an improved understanding of these differences could help teacher educators support trainees in specific aspects of their online presence. A survey of trainee teachers and head teachers was conducted and the data was analysed to identify key variations in values and attitudes in relation to social media posts.

Keywords

Social media; teacher training; employment; trainee teachers; headteachers; digital identity; online behaviour.

Introduction

Graduate employability is a key priority of higher education with the independent regulator of higher education in England aiming to ensure that all students are able to progress into employment (Office for Students, 2020). Ofsted (2020) also monitor the preparation of initial teacher education (ITE) students for employment, therefore support for gaining graduate employment, as a newly qualified teacher (NQT) is undoubtedly high on the agenda across teacher training providers. However, it is notable that trainee teachers may face barriers, in relation to the professional standards, when seeking a first teaching post. Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) are in a time of transition as they leave student life and enter the teaching profession and may face pressures outside their working environment from a broad base of friends and acquaintances with a wide range of social values. Potentially in contrast to this, the primary education sector expects specific standards of personal conduct and behaviour. The Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2012, 10) state that 'a teacher is expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct' and 'must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach'.

Citation

Onions, S. and Ferdinand, M. (2021) 'Lasering the digital tattoo: how differences between headteacher and newly qualified teacher perspectives on online presence may affect employability, *TEAN journal*, 13(1), pp. 54-65.

ONIONS & FERDINAND: LASERING THE DIGITAL TATTOO: HOW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEADTEACHER AND NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE PRESENCE MAY AFFECT EMPLOYABILITY

OFCOM (2019) report that 79% of adults use a smartphone and that UK internet users on average spend 3 hours 29 minutes per day using the internet with the greatest usage in the younger age groups. Therefore, most people, including trainee teachers, will have an extensive digital footprint and it is clear therefore that when applying for teaching posts problems could arise if a trainee teacher's online presence does not reflect the high standards of personal conduct set out in the Teachers' Standards. It could also be suggested that their online behaviours could unintentionally challenge the values of their prospective employers.

A recent YouGov survey of business decision makers found that 19% of employers had ruled out potential job candidates based on their online activity. Aggressive and offensive language was identified as the most likely factor to discourage potential employers with 75% of respondents stating this would be a reason not to offer employment. Following this, drug misuse at 71% and photos including drunkenness at 49% would also deter employers from offering posts. Poor spelling and grammar was also identified as important with 56% of respondents stating that this would influence their decision making.

It is not currently known to what extent head teachers as employers use online searching of candidates as a selection strategy or what behaviours would deter them from shortlisting or appointing an applicant. This small-scale study will seek to explore the impact of an individual's online presence on gaining employment as a newly qualified teacher (NQT) focusing specifically on the attitudes, values and approaches taken by final year trainee teachers in their use of social media and to investigate whether they consider that this could impact on their employability. The study will seek to identify whether trainees' perceptions of the relevance of their online presence are accurate with a view to supporting future cohorts in managing their online presence more effectively.

The study will also consider the use of professional social media accounts and the extent to which these can impact positively on NQTs' employability. Goa and Li (2019) identify the power of social media sites such as Twitter to engage educators in professional learning and development, however the positive impact on teachers' employability is under-researched. Hence, this study will also explore the impact that the professional use of social media can have on employability and whether trainee teachers' views and perceptions of the importance of these accounts reflect head teachers' views.

Finally, the study will seek to identify which aspects of a trainee teacher's online presence influence employers' decision making, either positively or negatively when shortlisting and appointing newly qualified teachers.

Literature Review

This literature review will consider the use of social media to enhance a professional online presence and the ethics, use and misuse of interactive technology in social contexts.

The use of social media to enhance a professional online presence.

OFCOM (2018) report that 64% of adults in Great Britain agree that the internet is an essential part of their life. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the group with the highest rate of usage are the under-35s, with over 80% agreement. OFCOM (2018) highlight that 88% of adults who use the internet and mobile technology spend on average 24 hours a week online which is double the figure for 2007.

Prensky (2001) identified digital natives as those who had used technology from childhood and were thus confident and enthusiastic users of new technology. Karabatak and Karabatak (2020) similarly identify

ONIONS & FERDINAND: LASERING THE DIGITAL TATTOO: HOW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEADTEACHER AND NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE PRESENCE MAY AFFECT EMPLOYABILITY

generation Z as a group who have used technology from a very early age and who make significant use of technology throughout all aspects of their lives. They suggest greater awareness is needed by this group about their digital footprint identifying an active and a passive form of digital footprint. Karabatak and Karabatak (2020) define a passive digital footprint as the data collected through browser, search engine and social media companies about an individual's usage while an active digital footprint includes e-mail and social media posts that are produced for an audience. While both forms of digital footprint could have an impact on careers this study will focus on active digital footprints in the form of social media posts.

Davis (2015) identifies the ways that social networking sites such as Twitter support teachers, including providing instant access to information, emotional and professional support for teachers within a learning community and as access to professional development. Lemon (2014) noted a particular benefit to pre-service (trainee) teachers of using Twitter to support their time in school. Furthermore, the use of Twitter was noted by Lemon (2014) to scaffold a professional identity with pre-service teachers engaging to support each other, seeking advice and questioning whilst maintaining professional etiquette. This level of interaction in social media communities further defines a teacher's online presence whilst establishing an online professional identity.

Prestridge (2019) similarly illuminates the growth of social media as a professional development and networking tool for teachers, also noting a difference in those who only consume knowledge and those who contribute to the generation of knowledge, hence further contributing to their own online presence. Gao and Li (2019) identify that the benefits of Twitter as a professional tool do not need a strong understanding of technology, although users with a lower self-perception of status may not have the professional confidence to engage in professional discussion on social media. Therefore, it could be suggested that it is not the use of the technology that needs to be taught but how to use it cultivate a confident professional online presence. Francera (2020) identified Twitter as the preferred platform for professional learning in schools and identified the 280-character limit as important as shorter, more instantaneous posts developed a more dynamic sense of conversation. They also cited Twitter's global reach that facilitated discussion across the globe and the ease with which resources could be shared as contributing factors to its preferred status.

Further to this, Lucky and Rubin (2017) advocate deliberately cultivating a professional online presence, although there is no current research to indicate whether this has any positive influence on head teachers as employers. Ruan et al. (2020) go further and state that a digital identity is an essential aspect of professional responsibility and should be incorporated into training programmes. Moreover, in cultivating a professional online identity, the risks associated with any online presence should be considered. O'Keeffe (2018) identifies these as barriers to professional use of social media, particularly the concerns of posting something that misrepresents an individual or their institution, thus suggesting that some trainee teachers are reluctant to use social media beyond personal use. In support of this, Saini and Abraham (2019) address the perceptions of pre-service teachers of using Twitter professionally who primarily perceive it as a social tool.

The ethics, use and misuse of interactive technology in social contexts.

OFCOM (2018) identify that access to smartphones means that people are able to access social media at all locations while Fox and Bird (2015) indicate that social media offers teachers opportunities to interact in new ways both personally and professionally. The tensions inherent in this include whether to accept colleagues as friends on social media sites and personal pages appearing in professional accounts. Some

ONIONS & FERDINAND: LASERING THE DIGITAL TATTOO: HOW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEADTEACHER AND NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE PRESENCE MAY AFFECT EMPLOYABILITY

benefits of merging professional and personal lives are also identified by Fox and Bird (2015) such as physical 'teach meets' as a result of online networking and a merge of personal and professional identities.

Carpenter et al (2019) further consider this overlap in personal and professional identity and discuss how an intended audience and actual audience may differ. This is of importance to NQTs' employability as an individual could intend their peers to be the audience, for example in making a comment about lack of motivation for work, but fail to consider the perception of a Head teacher viewing their profile. 'Content collapse' is another risk identified by Carpenter et al (2019) which is when the limited length of a post, particularly on Twitter, may mean the content is taken out of context or an audience may only view part of a discussion. Similarly, Thunman and Persson (2017) consider teachers' use of Facebook noting that the platform was intended for personal use but is increasingly used in professional context which raises ethical dilemmas in relation to how much teachers reveal of their own personal life on social media.

Research in the United States by Carpenter et al (2019) identifies that almost 1 in 3 teachers include family roles such as 'father', 'mother', in their professional Twitter profiles, suggesting a perceived compatibility with professional identity. Far fewer teachers made theistic references (5.1%) or indicated political affiliation (0.7%) in their profiles, suggesting perceived incompatibility with professional identity. They conclude that a 'better understanding of how teachers use social media could inform future policy that is more cohesive across the profession and help prevent teachers from being sanctioned for their social media activities.'

However, a teacher's online presence results not only from a professional use of social media and as internet use increases amongst all age groups NQTs develop an extensive digital footprint which originates in childhood. OFCOM (2019) identify that 42% 5-7 year olds have their own tablet with 82% going online and 70% using YouTube. Within the 12-15 year old age phase this increases to 99% going online and 69% having a social media profile. The research identifies that vlogging is increasing in popularity with children of all ages making videos, mimicking other YouTube content, thus contributing to their online presence in ways which may not be viewed positively by future employers. As such, Buchanan et al. (2017) recognise that children are less likely than adults to consider the consequences of their digital footprint and therefore that children need to be educated in relation to their online presence and risks to future employment.

Warnick et al. (2016) discuss the specific court cases and news stories involving teachers and social networking, and identify four categories: Statements made by educators which reflect poorly on their professional judgement as teachers, such as contempt for students and their families or admitting cheating behaviours; posts which reveal illegal or reckless behaviour; inappropriate attention to students through social networking, including stalking; and behaviour which presents an undesirable example to children such as drunkenness. Warnick et al. (2016) identify widespread differences in school policy but conclude that as long as teachers do their best to ensure their activities are not easily linked to their students or their role as a teacher they should be afforded the same rights to privacy that all members of society have.

The extent to which head teachers are influenced by an applicant's online presence is not known, however, a study of medical school admissions officers in the United States found that 9% routinely looked at applicants' social media presence, with half commenting that unprofessional social media content could negatively affect a student's chance of acceptance, Glauser (2018). As O'Connor and Smidt (2015) discuss, the increased use of social media sites has had an impact on employees' behaviour and has led to the use

ONIONS & FERDINAND: LASERING THE DIGITAL TATTOO: HOW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEADTEACHER AND NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE PRESENCE MAY AFFECT EMPLOYABILITY

of the term 'Facebook Fired', where an employee is fired for personal social media use. Further to this, Fagell (2018) cites an example whereby a teacher commented negatively about her employer online, other teachers responded sympathetically but did not consider the audience, which included parents, and concludes that there is no such thing as privacy online.

There is clear evidence that social media posts have an impact on professional reputation and employability. However, what is less well understood is the type of content that causes problems for individuals in the primary education sector and whether job applicants and headteachers have a shared view on what constitutes an acceptable online presence.

Methods

This small-scale study will consider the following question.

What similarities and differences exist between head teacher and student teachers perspectives on an appropriate online presence.

The study was carried out within the Faculty of Education at Edge Hill University and within the Faculty of Education Partnership. A wide sample of Head Teachers from multiple local authorities, a sample of final year undergraduate primary trainee teachers from the researchers' institution were invited to participate in the research. The rationale for this was to gather data from employers and potential employees across different programmes and geographical employment destinations to ensure a broad perspective was identified.

The head teacher participant group were invited to complete a questionnaire via a Bristol Online survey which covered a series of questions relating to Head Teachers' views and experiences of considering online presence when appointing NQTs. Questions provided options for a closed response such as yes / no, in reply to 'Have you ever not shortlisted a candidate as a result of their online presence?' Or multiple response options to questions such as 'Which of the listed behaviours would prevent you from shortlisting a candidate?' These closed responses aimed to provide some sense of scale and emerging trends. Each question also gave an option for an open comment in an attempt to discern more about the participants' perceptions and emotional response to the questions. Similarly, a Bristol Online survey was carried out covering a series of questions relating to final year trainee teachers' perception of the impact of their online presence on their NQT employability. The trainee teachers' survey placed significant focus on their own online presence such as, 'Has any content ever been posted by another person online, for example a photograph of you or being tagged in a post, which could question your professionalism?' However, the trainee teacher survey also addressed the participant's perception of a Head Teacher's views, for example, 'Do you think Head Teachers would be negatively influenced by social photographs of candidates featuring alcohol when appointing NQTs?' The purpose of aligning questions across both surveys was to provide some insight into the connection between the employers' perceptions and the employees' online behaviours.

The data was analysed by comparison of the quantitative responses across the two participant groups and the identification of themes emerging from both the closed and open questions.

Ethical Considerations

BERA ethical guidelines (2018) were adopted for the purposes of this study, with careful consideration of confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent. When invited to respond to the survey, participants were made aware that they could complete the questionnaire anonymously, that participation was

ONIONS & FERDINAND: LASERING THE DIGITAL TATTOO: HOW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEADTEACHER AND NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE PRESENCE MAY AFFECT EMPLOYABILITY

entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw up to the point at which they submitted the questionnaire. No incentives were offered to participate.

There were no obvious disadvantages to any participant group in taking part and individuals were not identified in the study. Given the relationship of the researchers to the participant group of current students, it was important to reinforce that any student declining to participate in or deciding to withdraw from research would not suffer any negative consequences.

No access was gained to any participant's social media or online presence as a result of data collected. However, at the onset of the research it was possible that a participant could disclose illegal behaviour, in which case disclosure to the appropriate authorities would be considered. At all times the decision to override agreements on confidentiality and anonymity would only be taken after careful and thorough deliberation.

It was important to consider that Head Teachers may be reluctant to provide information relating to the use of selection procedures that are not disclosed to candidates. For example, a job advertisement and accompanying person specification is unlikely to specify scrutiny of social media as a selection criterion, therefore it could be considered unethical for employers to adopt this method. Hence Head Teacher participants were given strong assurances that they would not be identified as a result of data collected. Additionally, as the participant group of Head Teachers were recruited from existing partnerships it was important to reassure Head Teachers that participation was voluntary, anonymous and would not impact on future partnerships.

Findings

The analysis of the data revealed several emerging themes which provide some insight into the similarities and differences between head teacher and student teachers perspectives on an appropriate online presence.

Theme 1 - Trainee teachers' perceptions of an appropriate online presence

Trainee teachers are explicitly aware of their responsibility to ensure that their online presence is compatible with their professional role, with a large proportion identifying that they had made changes specifically to enhance employability. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter were used almost equally by all respondents with 80% having previously removed photographs or untagged themselves with a view to enhancing employability. Over half had 'unfriended' individuals on social media accounts who may have an impact on future employability.

All of the trainee teacher participant group expect head teachers to search their profiles online with comments such as 'I was told on my final placement that the head teacher searched anyone coming into school (including students) on social media.' Further to this comments also evidence that some trainee teachers accept this practice 'this doesn't worry or surprise me, I see [some] trainees' statuses and think I wouldn't want them working in my school!'

Only 9% admitted to having posted content that could question their professionalism with almost all of these saying they had done this under the influence of alcohol. A much greater proportion stated that content which could question their professionalism had been posted online by a third party although they had, in most cases, asked the third party to remove the content. This indicates an awareness of the risks to their professional reputation from third party posts and a proactivity in managing their online presence.

ONIONS & FERDINAND: LASERING THE DIGITAL TATTOO: HOW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEADTEACHER AND NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE PRESENCE MAY AFFECT EMPLOYABILITY

Thus, the majority are not significantly concerned about their online presence and are confident that any searches by potential employers would not return images or posts that could present barriers to gaining employment.

Notably, all trainee teacher participants thought that head teachers would be negatively influenced by photographs featuring alcohol and the majority of the trainee teacher participants stated that there were photographs of them online featuring alcohol. Yet a very small proportion identified that there was anything online that could question their professionalism. This contradiction suggests that either most applicants consider their settings to be secure enough to prevent employers from viewing personal photographs or that they believe that head teachers would not be negatively influenced by normal social situations which do not, in their view, question their professionalism. Only 53% felt that poor spelling or grammar would also have a negative impact. Even more surprisingly only 26% felt that comments relating to previous placements would have a negative impact. This highlights an issue around intended audience as with the example identified by Fagell (2018) which concludes that there is no such thing as privacy online.

Theme 2 - Head teachers' perceptions of an appropriate online presence

Head teachers were concerned about the use of social media and were cautious about the potential for damage to individuals and schools, with one head teacher even saying teachers should not have any social media accounts. However, it is important that head teachers are realistic about current and increasing use of social media and do not impose unrealistic expectations given that almost all of the applicants surveyed use social media, reflecting national statistics of 77% of the population having a social media account with greater use in the younger age groups (OFCOM, 2019).

Both head teachers and applicants were using broadly the same social media platforms with the highest correlation between each survey in the use of Facebook. However, Snapchat was used by a large proportion of applicants and not widely recognised by head teachers which reflects the notion that Facebook is for 'older people' and that social media platforms can be linked to specific demographics (Sweney, 2018).

In respect of serving teachers, 39% of head teachers had advised members of staff to make changes to their social media accounts, with one disclosing discussions with a 'staff member who posted photos which contradicted their current sickness absence on their Facebook page which was shared by one of their friends with me.' In addition to this, 18% of headteachers had not shortlisted a candidate due to their social media presence and 4% had withdrawn a job offer as a result of an applicant's online presence.

It was interesting to note that a greater proportion of head teachers identified issues with existing employees than with prospective employees. This could be due to the Head teacher having better access to their accounts; other staff, parents or pupils reporting issues or a greater complacency developing once teachers are in post. However, further explanation could be that younger, newer teachers who have grown up using the internet are more discernible users and have a greater awareness of managing their settings and online presence, with guidance such as that identified by Carpenter and Morrison (2018) increasing in teacher training settings.

Theme 3 - The ethical dilemma for employers searching for candidates online

A majority of head teachers considered it to be ethical to search for applicants online with some even saying it was their duty to do so. The head teachers surveyed strongly suggested that the nature of

ONIONS & FERDINAND: LASERING THE DIGITAL TATTOO: HOW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEADTEACHER AND NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE PRESENCE MAY AFFECT EMPLOYABILITY

teaching as a career justified the precautions being taken at the pre-employment stage with a key theme being that this was to avoid problems in the future.

65% of head teachers admitted to researching a candidate's online presence when considering candidates for a teaching post with one head teacher commenting they were 'Looking for anything which might, for example if seen by a parent, bring the school into disrepute in any way' and another comment to 'Always check the Facebook page and ensure it is secure and the profile picture appropriate. Also google them!' Head teachers' justification for searching for candidates online was mainly generic and did not relate to specific concerns around safeguarding or reputation. Comments included 'If parents and pupils can see it then it is probably wise for employers to look.' And 'This is material that is accessible to ALL, it would be irresponsible as an employer not to check this kind of information.'

Trainee teachers had mixed views on the ethical appropriateness of head teachers searching for applicants online. In terms of personal liberty, they appear to resent the possibility of school and head teachers searching an individual's online presence. 'It is an invasion of privacy. Every individual is entitled to interact with family friends on the internet and share memories without the fear that they be misconstrued by those who have no business stalking you online.' Although there was a sense of scale, that looking at public information may be acceptable but searching in more depth may be less acceptable. 'It is a way to check that the person meets personal specifications – as long as they don't start digging for information inappropriately.'

However, trainee teachers also accept that a prospective job candidate's posts may contain examples of unacceptable views or unprofessional values and therefore it is appropriate for schools to check social media with comments such as 'If the information isn't private, it's available for anyone to see' This mixed response could be explained by Thunman and Persson's (2017) findings that social media, particularly Facebook was intended for personal use but its increasing use in professional contexts raises ethical dilemmas.

'Yes and no. I find this question difficult. In terms of myself and I believe most other people we do drink alcohol, which is not a crime. We might smoke, again not against the law. And yes we do swear and make sexualised jokes as adults. Again not against the law. In those terms I do find it frustrating that those things which happen in our own personal lives amongst our friends and family somehow contribute to me being 'unprofessional' and a 'bad role model/ teacher'. However, for some who may post things which slander a school or employer, or even display signs of racism in their online presence, then I believe checking social media is appropriate.'

Theme 5 - The online behaviours which could impact (either negatively or positively) on their employability. Almost all trainee teachers expect that a head teacher would be positively influenced by a professional media account, particularly Twitter, although only three quarters had created a professional Twitter account linked to their professional role. Respondents also considered that links to charities, family photographs and graduation photos have the potential to make a positive impression on head teachers. However, there was little evidence to suggest that head teachers are positively influenced by any online content, including professional Twitter accounts, suggesting some caution about mixing personal and professional internet use. Generally head teachers had an unenthusiastic response to any activities posted on social media including those that could be viewed as positive, with one head teacher even commenting that 'I don't think students coming into the profession should have these accounts at all.' Given Gao and Li's (2019) view that the use of Twitter as a professional tool requires professional confidence, it seems

ONIONS & FERDINAND: LASERING THE DIGITAL TATTOO: HOW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEADTEACHER AND NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE PRESENCE MAY AFFECT EMPLOYABILITY

likely that this is a perception that will change as professional use becomes more widespread. Head teachers also need to recognise the growing merging of personal and professional online identities such as those identified by Carpenter et al. (2019).

Of particular interest was what specific aspects of online presence would negatively influence a head teacher. Unsurprisingly, drunkenness presented one of the greatest concerns although alcohol per se was considered less detrimental in context. Wine with a meal in a restaurant was considered to be less problematic than drinking lager or shots of spirits, although it should be noted that a small proportion of head teachers would choose not to shortlist a candidate on the basis of any photograph featuring alcohol. Almost half of head teachers felt they would be negatively influenced by posts with links to political organisations. Poor spelling and grammar in social media posts was just as detrimental to a candidate's prospects as images featuring drunkenness. Given the nature of the employment, attention to spelling and grammar is unsurprising, but of equal concern to head teachers were comments linked to previous placement schools. Although context was noted as being important, head teachers commented that they were looking for any posts which may indicate the applicant would be unable to cope with the workload. Only one head teacher in the response group identified that they would be positively influenced by comments about a previous placement, again highlighting the lag in professional social media use reaching experienced teachers, and the caution around any social media use. These concerns do reflect the four categories of perceived misuse identified by Warnick et al. (2016) but also reinforce the concern around widespread differences in school policy.

Conclusion

Given the data from OFCOM (2018) that 80% of under 35s consider the internet to be an essential part of their life, it is prudent for head teachers to check an applicants' online presence, to reduce the risk of parents, children or other stakeholders accessing information which may present a safeguarding risk or bring the school into disrepute. It is also unsurprising that head teachers are cautious given the concerns identified by O'Keeffe (2018) of posting something that misrepresents an individual or their institution. However, it is important that Head Teachers are realistic about current and increasing use of social media and do not impose unrealistic expectations given that almost all of the applicants surveyed use social media, reflecting national statistics of 77% of the population having a social media account with greater use in the younger age groups (OFCOM, 2019).

Although not as many head teachers actually search for candidates online as applicants predict, it is still advisable for trainee teachers to ensure their online presence supports their professional identity to reduce the risk of an early elimination from an application process. Although this may be partially achievable through privacy settings or through using platforms such as Snapchat, it is more important for trainee teachers and NQTs to adopt the notion that there is no such thing as privacy online. This is particularly relevant when looking at the increased instances of head teachers providing advice to teachers already in employment as it seems likely that teachers will friend colleagues and previous posts will become visible. Additionally, another individual's settings may not be completely private, therefore comments that are believed only to be available to a limited audience may become public as a result of another individual's settings. Regardless of privacy settings, any online content can be forwarded, copied and shared.

Trainee teachers and NQTs were concerned about the ethical appropriateness of head teachers searching for applicants online although they accept that it is common practice. Teacher educators have a responsibility to develop trainee teachers' understanding to reduce the perception that head teachers are

ONIONS & FERDINAND: LASERING THE DIGITAL TATTOO: HOW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEADTEACHER AND NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE PRESENCE MAY AFFECT EMPLOYABILITY

prying on their private lives and to develop trainees' understanding of the link between their online presence and Part 2. of the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2013). For example, enjoying a glass of wine in a restaurant could not be considered to conflict with the requirement for teachers to 'uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school' (DfE, 2013) but being drunk in a public place could be. Whether these behaviours are witnessed by a head teacher or by a parent in real time or viewed online they should not be considered differently.

From the survey data it is clear that trainee teachers should pay particular attention to spelling and grammar in all online activity including personal use. It is not uncommon for personal, informal communication to adopt the use of non-standard English; however, this should be used with caution and with a view to the perception of a future employer. It would be expected that standard English would be adopted more widely on professional accounts. In addition, the notion of content collapse (Carpenter et al 2019) should be considered in relation to spelling and grammar raising a further question of whether teacher educators interacting with current trainee teachers should point out spelling and grammatical errors on professional Twitter posts in the interest of their future employability.

Although some literature advocates all trainee teachers being required to set up professional accounts, this should be a personal choice as an online identity should not be enforced. However, lack of professional confidence has been identified as a barrier to professional social media use, as has concern over misrepresentation, therefore trainee teachers' use of professional social media should be scaffolded and supported with advice from the training provider. In particular guidance should be given regarding comments linked to professional practice as these were a significant concern for head teachers.

There does remain a wide spectrum of head teacher views and some perspectives could be considered to restrict an individual's right to a reasonable work / life balance and realm of privacy, therefore schools should use model policies set by a local authority or teaching union to ensure that their personal views reflect wider perspectives. Schools should also be offered CPD by teacher educators on the professional benefits of social media, which would not only support their understanding of applicant behaviour but could enhance practice within the school setting as a greater proportion of teachers engage with networking and developing a professional identity online.

References

- British Educational Research Association (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, 4th edn. London: British Educational Research Association.
- Buchanan, R., Southgate, E., Smith, S. P., Murray, T. and Noble, B. (2017) 'Post no photos, leave no trace: Children's digital footprint management strategies', *E-Learning and Digital Media*, 14(5), pp. 275–290. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2042753017751711> (Accessed: 30 Nov 2020).
- Carpenter, J., Kimmons, R., Short, C., Clements, K. and Staples, E. (2019) 'Teacher identity and crossing the professional-personal divide on twitter', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 81, pp. 1-12. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com.edgehill.idm.oclc.org/science/article/pii/S0742051X18314173> (Accessed: 30 Nov 2020).
- Carpenter, J. and Morrison, S. (2018) 'Enhancing teacher education ... with Twitter?: Social media offers preservice teachers a large network of mentors and colleagues who can help them translate theory into practice as they launch their new careers', *Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(1) pp.25. Available at: <https://go-galegroup->

ONIONS & FERDINAND: LASERING THE DIGITAL TATTOO: HOW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEADTEACHER AND NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE PRESENCE MAY AFFECT EMPLOYABILITY

- com.edgehill.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=edge&id=GALE|A562866788&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon (Accessed: 30 Nov 2020).
- Davis, K. (2015) 'Teachers' perceptions of Twitter for professional development', *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 37(17), pp. 1551-1558. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline-com.edgehill.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.3109/09638288.2015.1052576> (Accessed: 30 Nov 2020).
- Department for Education (2013) *Teachers' Standards*. Department for Education. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/teachers%20standards.pdf> (Accessed: 30 Nov 2020).
- Edge Hill University (2018) *Vision and Values – University Vision 2020*. Available at: <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/corporate-information/vision-and-values/> (Accessed: 24 June 2019).
- Fagell, P. L. (2018) 'Teachers and social media: A cautionary tale about the risks', *Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(2), pp. 68. Available at: <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A562866823/ITOF?u=edge&sid=ITOF&xid=8fdc0ffa>. (Accessed: 30 Nov 2020).
- Fancera, S. (2020) 'School leadership for professional development: the role of social media and networks', *Professional Development in Education*, 46(4), pp. 664-676. Available at: <https://www-tandfonline-com.edgehill.idm.oclc.org/doi/pdf/10.1080/19415257.2019.1629615?needAccess=true> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- Fox, A. and Bird, T. (2017) 'The challenge to professionals of using social media: teachers in England negotiating personal-professional identities', *Education and Information Technologies*, 22(2), pp. 647–675. Available at: <https://link-springer-com.edgehill.idm.oclc.org/article/10.1007%2Fs10639-015-9442-0> (Accessed: 30 Nov 2020).
- Gao, F. and Li, L. (2019) 'Predicting educators' use of Twitter for professional learning and development', *Education and Information technologies*, pp. 1-17. Available at: <https://link-springer-com.edgehill.idm.oclc.org/article/10.1007%2Fs10639-019-09872-9> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- Glauser, W. (2018) 'Students tidy online presence before applying to medical school and residency', *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 190(38), pp. E1146-E1147. Available at: <https://go-galegroup-com.edgehill.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=ITOF&u=edge&id=GALE|A555409203&v=2.1&it=r&sid=summon> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- Karabatak, S. and Karabatak, M. (2020) 'Z Generation Students and Their Digital Footprints', *8th International Symposium on Digital Forensics and Security (ISDFS)*, Beirut.
- Lemon, N. (2014) 'Twitter and Teacher Education: Exploring Teacher, Social, and Cognitive Presence in Professional Use of Social Media', *Teacher Education and Practice*, 27(4), pp. 532+. Available at: <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A514657823/AONE?u=edge&sid=AONE&xid=188dceec>. (Accessed: 30 Nov 2020).
- Lucky, S., and Rubin, J. (2017) 'Cultivating Your Academic Online Presence', *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 12(2). Available at: <https://doaj.org/article/2393e34f45ed41b3a8d08d87df505194> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- NEU (2019) National, Education Union. Available at: <https://neu.org.uk/advice/social-media-and-online-safety> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- O'Connor, K. and Schmidt, G. (2015) "'Facebook Fired" Legal Standards for Social Media-Based Terminations of K-12 Public School Teachers', *SAGE Open*, 5(1). Available at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2158244015575636> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).

ONIONS & FERDINAND: LASERING THE DIGITAL TATTOO: HOW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HEADTEACHER AND NEWLY QUALIFIED TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON ONLINE PRESENCE MAY AFFECT EMPLOYABILITY

- O'Keeffe, M. (2019) 'Academic Twitter and professional learning: myths and realities', *International Journal for Academic Development*, 24(1), pp. 35-46. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1360144X.2018.1520109> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- OFCOM (2018) *Communications Market Report*. Available from: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/117256/CMR-2018-narrative-report.pdf (Accessed 30 Nov 2020).
- OFCOM. 2019. *Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report*. Available at: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/134907/Children-and-Parents-Media-Use-and-Attitudes-2018.pdf (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- Payton, M. (2016) 'Primary school teacher refused entry to Birmingham bar shouts 'my dad owns you' at bouncer', *The Independent*, 23 August. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/birmingham-geisha-bar-primary-school-teacher-my-dad-owns-you-bouncer-a7205326.html> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- Prensky, M. (2001) 'Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part 1', *On the Horizon*, 9(5) pp. 1-6. Available at: <https://www-emerald-com.edgehill.idm.oclc.org/insight/content/doi/10.1108/10748120110424816/full/pdf?title=digital-natives-digital-immigrants-part-1> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- Prestridge, S. (2019) 'Categorising teachers' use of social media for their professional learning: A self-generating professional learning paradigm', *Computers and Education*, 129, pp. 143-158. Available at: <https://www-sciencedirect-com.edgehill.idm.oclc.org/science/article/pii/S0360131518303002> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- Ruan, B., Yilmaz, Y., Lu, D., Lee, M. and Chan, T. (2020) 'Defining the Digital Self: A Qualitative Study to Explore the Digital Component of Professional Identity in the Health Professions', *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 22(9). doi: 10.2196/21416 (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- Saini, C. and Abraham, J. (2019) 'Modeling educational usage of social media in pre-service teacher education', *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 31(1), pp. 21–55. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/journal/12528> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- Sweney, M. (2018) 'Is Facebook for old people? Over-55s flock in as the young leave', *Guardian Online*, 12 February. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/feb/12/is-facebook-for-old-people-over-55s-flock-in-as-the-young-leave> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- Surmelioglu, Y. and Seferoglu, S. (2019) 'An examination of digital footprint awareness and digital experiences of higher education students', *World Journal on Educational Technology*, 11(1), Available at: <https://sproc.org/ojs/index.php/wjet/article/view/4009> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- Thunman, E. and Persson, M. (2017) 'Ethical dilemmas on social media: Swedish secondary teachers' boundary management on Facebook. Teacher Development', *An international journal of teachers' professional development*, 22(2), pp 175-190. Available at: <https://www-tandfonline-com.edgehill.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1080/13664530.2017.1371634> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- Warnick, B., R. Bitters, T. A., Falk, T. M. and Kim, S. H. (2016) 'Social Media Use and Teacher Ethics', *Educational Policy*, 30(5), pp. 771–795. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904814552895> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).
- You Gov. (2017) *Disgracebook: One in five employers have turned down a candidate because of social media*. Available at: <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2017/04/10/disgracebook-one-five-employers-have-turned-down-c> (Accessed: 30 November 2020).