ATL ADVICE

ATL the education union

Student ✓ NQ / probationer ✓ Support staff ✓ Teacher ✓ Lecturer ✓ Leader / manager ✓

Cyberbullying

ATL is receiving an increasing number of contacts from members who are concerned about comments and/or images held on certain websites, including:

• www.twitter.com
• www.ratemyteachers.com
• www.wikipedia.org
• www.facebook.com
• www.youtube.com.

Our members tell us that these comments and images can be derogatory, abusive and humiliating. Moreover, where images are published they are usually taken without members' consent using a camera/phone.

There is a catch-all offence under Section 127 of the Communications Act 2003. This makes it illegal to send "by means of a public electronic communications network a message that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character". It is also an offence if a person "for the purpose of causing annoyance, inconvenience or needless anxiety to another, he [...] sends [...] a message that he knows to be false".

ATL's view

ATL calls upon schools and colleges to ensure their anti-bullying policies incorporate and include cyberbullying and work with the whole school community to try and prevent cyberbullying.

ATL expects headteachers, principals and other appropriate senior managers to support members when they raise concerns relating to cyberbullying. The school or college management should take all reasonable steps to have offensive material removed from websites on behalf of their staff or fully support members of staff who are required to request that material is removed themselves.

We also call upon website providers to take firmer action to block offensive material. ATL's position is that such websites should be more vigilant when monitoring the appropriateness of student comments and video clips. They must also incorporate easily accessible complaints facilities to allow concerns to be registered and addressed. If sites do not have such complaints procedures, members should inform ATL.

This five-step guide is intended to help members ensure offensive material is quickly removed and that appropriate action is taken against the perpetrators.

Advice to ATL members

Step 1: If you discover that, arising from your employment as an education professional, a website contains incorrect, inappropriate or inflammatory written material relating to you, or images of you which have been taken and/or which are being used without your permission, then you should immediately report this to a senior manager at your school.

Step 2: The senior manager (who may be your headteacher or principal) should conduct a prompt investigation.

Step 3: If in the course of his or her investigation it is found that a pupil or student submitted the material to the website then that pupil should be disciplined in line with the school's disciplinary procedures.

Step 4: Where appropriate, the senior manager should approach the website hosts to ensure the material is either amended or removed as a matter of urgency, ie within 24 hours. If the website requires the individual who is complaining to do so personally the school/college should give their full support and assistance.

Checks should be carried out to ensure that the requested amendments or removals are made. If the website(s) will not cooperate, the senior manager

should contact the internet service provider (ISP). An ISP has the ability to block access to certain pages and, in exceptional cases, can close down a website.

Even though pages may be removed from a particular website, they are stored (ie 'cached') by search engines and can be retrieved, for example, by carrying out a Google search. Consequently the senior manager should ensure the website takes steps to 'uncache' the offending page(s). Google provides instructions on how to uncache material through the 'webmaster' help service on their home page.

Step 5: If the material is threatening and/or intimidating, then senior management should, with the member's consent, report the matter to the police. Mindful of their health and safety duty of care, management should offer the member of staff support and appropriate stress counselling.

If you find in this situation that your school refuses to support you, contact ATL for assistance as soon as possible.

In May 2014, social network Facebook launched its own UK-based anti-bullying centre, where users of the site can go for advice on preventing and reporting cyber-bullying.

The Facebook Bullying Prevention Centre (https://www.facebook.com/safety/bullying) offers advice to teenagers, parents and teachers and new resources that have been added in collaboration with charities and anti-bullying campaign groups.