Every Insights

from Every HR

How to Carry Out Online Searches on Candidates

every
By IRIS

A change in KCSIE 2022 states 'As part of the shortlisting process, Schools and Colleges should consider carrying out an online search as part of their due diligence on the shortlisted candidates. This may help identify any incidents or issues that have happened, which the school or college might want to explore with the applicant at interview.'

Scoping out a candidate's social media profiles can help to identify any extreme views or discriminatory behaviour. But what should be considered when doing so? In September, we were joined by Victoria Blake, Principal HR Consultant at Stone King LLP, for a live webinar and lowdown on what this guidance means to your organisation's recruitment strategy.

Read on to learn the key considerations your School or Trust needs to know!

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1.

KCSIE: 'SHOULD' VS 'MUST'

KCSIE is a document that's revised annually, meaning Schools and Trusts always know to be aware that important changes are due to come into place each Summer. Rather handily, towards the end of KCSIE is a summary of substantive changes that have been made on the year before, so you're absolutely clear about what you need to look at and revise.

The change we're talking about here is paragraph 221 in part 3, Safer Recruitment. This new guidance sets out that schools should consider online searches as part of their due diligence checks on shortlisted candidates. Now, the first thing to think about is KCSIE's use of the words 'should' and 'must'. KCSIE state the term 'must' is used when the person in question is legally required to do something. 'Should' is used when the advice set out should be followed unless there is good reason not to. For the purpose of this guide, we're going to continue as though organisations aren't excluded from carrying out these online checks.

2.

WHO SHOULD CONDUCT ONLINE SEARCHES?

If you're part of a School or Trust with a HR department, then it makes sense for somebody within this area to carry out the online checks on candidates. If you're part of a smaller setting with only one or two staff members responsible

for HR and/or recruitment, then they are most likely best suited to carry out the online checks.

Now, it's important that whomever you nominate as your online searcher is not involved in any stages of the recruitment process that occur after the checks have been carried out. That's because the individual carrying out the online searches is likely to see something they wouldn't have ordinarily seen, potentially contributing to unconscious bias. Keeping your online searcher independent of other stages of recruitment will also help to limit the risk of any discrimination cases that could surface later down the line.

3.

WHAT TYPES OF BEHAVIOUR SHOULD BE FLAGGED FROM AN ONLINE SEARCH?

Online searches should only take place after shortlisting, and only information that is deemed necessary to explore further at interview should be passed on to the recruitment panel.

Remember, online searches aren't to be treated as a witch-hunt. The types of information or behaviour you are looking for are those that could present:

• Safeguarding risks
• Reputational damage
• Cause for concern
• Information that differs to that detailed in the candidate's application

4.

HOW TO CARRY OUT AN ONLINE SEARCH

Different organisations will have different resources available to aid online searches. First things first, you need to establish the type of approach your School or Trust wants to take to this activity, so it's a consistent internal process and fair to your candidates.

The spectrum of online searches ranges from light to in-depth. An example of a lighter approach would be to conduct a simple search of the candidate's name, using a search engine like Google. To enhance this check, you might then search for:

- Candidate's full name and location
- Candidate's full name, location, and current employer
- Candidate's full name, location, current employer, and previous employer(s)

And so on.

Victoria also recommends looking at both local newspapers and national tabloids, like the Daily Mail. There are certain types of stories that you'd rather know about now than discover one, two, three years down the line!

5.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR ON CANDIDATES' SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES

Social media is the other standard area where it's fitting to carry out a search. Platforms to look at include (but aren't limited to):

Twitter
Facebook
Instagram
LinkedIn
TikTok
Online gaming sites, like Twitch

Naturally, many Schools and Trusts will have IT systems in place that prohibit users from accessing social media and/or gaming sites. So, a conversation with your IT team is a must to allow for a measure to be put into place that ensures your nominated individual can access these social media platforms to carry out the necessary checks.

We're all likely to have grown up being warned of the implications of 'loose' privacy settings on our social media accounts – no doubt that your organisation also works to educate its students on the types of information they should refrain from sharing on public domains.

So, there's relatively 'minimum' standards that Victoria would expect a candidate's social media profiles to already have in place, like:

- Strong privacy settings – as basic, social media profiles should be 'private' rather than 'public'
- Consistency – for example, a candidate's employment history* on LinkedIn should match those detailed on the CV

When using social media to carry out a search, it's also good practice to think about:

- What types of images has this candidate made available to the public domain? Are these appropriate? Remember, whatever you can find, your organisation's students, parents, employees, and visitors will be able to find, too!

- The types of views being expressed by the candidate. Could these be perceived or considered offensive? Discriminatory? If they were unearthed by a student, parent, employee, or visitor, could they catalyse an issue?

As with many stages in the recruitment process, remember that not everything you find might be as black and white as it first seems. For instance, in the case of employment history* on LinkedIn differing to what's detailed on a candidate's application. They might not have updated this social profile for months, or even years. And more often than not, many people now use a different name on their social profiles to those that they use professionally (usually as an exercise to enhance their privacy!). Whatever it is that you find and deem necessary to raise with the candidate at interview, you should always provide an opportunity for the candidate to offer an explanation for any concern(s).

6.

HOW TO CONSIDER DATA PROTECTION WHEN CARRYING OUT ONLINE SEARCHES

Do you need (or have the time to) be trawling back through five, ten years of candidate information available online? How far back you should search is to be determined by your School or Trust – take into account both your current social media usage policy and the types of issues that have been raised from online activities before.

Online searches need to comply with data protection laws in the same way as other parts of the application process. Searching for information on the candidate counts as data processing, meaning your activity must comply with the seven principles of data processing set out in UK GDPR. Every piece of personal data your school holds on a candidate must be processed lawfully, fairly, transparently, and collected for specific and legitimate purposes. Data also needs to be as relevant and as limited to what's necessary to achieve your purpose.

So, start by clearly defining the reason your organisation will be carrying out an online search on candidates. And ensure that any relevant recruitment policies detail that any candidates shortlisted for a vacancy must be informed that they'll be subjected to an online check and what this involves, with any concerns raised at interview.

When it comes to defining the lawful basis for processing this personal data, it's most likely to be a 'public task'. You're processing the data to determine the suitability of an individual to work with children and keep them safe, which is of public interest.

7.

ONLINE SEARCHES AND THE EQUALITY ACT, 2010

The Equality Act, 2010, works to protect candidates from discrimination of the nine protected characteristics during the recruitment process. Now, undertaking online searches is an activity that could increase your risk of being accused of discrimination during the process. You may find a reservation that you didn't know about, like a candidate being pregnant. This is why it's imperative that whoever carries out your online searches remains independent of the recruitment stages that follow shortlisting.

8. HOW TO USE EVERY HR TO RECORD ONLINE SEARCHES

Every's HR Software now has a module dedicated to the entire recruitment process, with features that aid this new KCSIE guidance. Firstly, our Recruitment and ATS module has a question library, a place for you to host all questions that could be included on applications and during the interview process, like any questions relating to these online searches.

For example, you might look to include the simple question 'are you active on social media?' on the initial application form. Or, you might find it more appropriate to include a declaration for candidates to click to say they understand and accept that if they are shortlisted for the role, they could be subjected to online searches. Much like the way they're informed of the requirement to have a DBS check.

When a vacancy is raised on Every HR, it has a 6-month expiration or an expiry date, complying with UK GDPR. As this date nears, the system sends the user an alert to prevent information being held longer than it should be by law.

The way that candidate information is stored on Every HR complies with all statutory requirements, and you also have the ability to add your own checks and/or questions to the SCR export. This then gives you the option to make any social media checks or details of related training readily available to Ofsted inspectors.

9. KEEPING STAFF AWARE OF CHANGES TO SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES

Our Training and CPD module naturally complements the implementation of these new online searches. Our e-learning course library includes courses on safeguarding and PREVENT, with the addition of information relating to social media usage coming soon. Courses are readily available to distribute to both new staff as part of the onboarding process, and existing staff as part of refresher training and regular upskilling.

The last thing to consider are the changes KCSIE 2022 will have had to your School or Trust's documents and policies. For instance, an updated policy on social media use. To ensure that staff have received, read, and understood the information our system uses 'read' receipts. In real-time, you can track and monitor who has or hasn't read the required document, using email reminders to drive completion rates.

For more information on how to incorporate online searches into your recruitment process, get in touch with our team of specialists.

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