



Guidance for Schools Undertaking Online Searches on Shortlisted Candidates (KCSIE 2022)

This guidance follows on from the email that was sent to Headteachers from the Council's HR Team on 12th July 2022 and should accompany the Safer Recruitment in Schools Policy and Procedure.

Keeping Children Safe in Education 2022 – Online Searches

The introduction of online searches have raised several queries and unfortunately the DfE have given no guidance on how these checks are to be undertaken or what information should be considered.

Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE) 2022 paragraph 220: states that:

“In addition, 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, and are publicly available online, which the school or college might want to explore with the applicant at interview.”

‘Should’ in statutory guidance means that schools should do it unless they have a good reason not to. If schools consider a good reason not to undertake online searches, the school should have a written rationale for this as they may need to justify the reason not to do so to an Ofsted Inspector or if the school’s recruitment procedures are scrutinised should something go wrong. The Council’s view is that online checks should be undertaken by schools.

The rationale for undertaking online searches is to prevent or minimise the risk of individuals being employed in schools when they are unsuitable to do so. An online check may help identify any incidents or issues that have happened and are publicly available that the school may want to explore with the candidate. This may be around their suitability to work with children.

Who should be subject to an Online Search?

Under the statutory guidance schools should undertake an online search for all shortlisted candidates, any relevant information or concerns should be discussed with the candidate at interview. As a minimum the Council advises that an online check should be undertaken on the preferred candidate.

Online searches should focus on any information that is relevant to safeguarding and the person’s suitability to take up the post. Care must be taken to avoid any unconscious bias or discrimination.

Online searches may also be undertaken on new governors when they are appointed to the Governing Body as governors have an important role to play in the safer recruitment process within schools. It is therefore essential that schools are confident that there are no concerns about a governor’s ability to recognise and demonstrate appropriate behaviours in a safeguarding context.

In addition, an online search may also be undertaken on volunteers working in school. This would cover those volunteers that are in school on a regular basis or for a specific period of time, rather than those that help out on an ad-hoc basis, such as a parent/carer accompanying a school trip.

How is a search to be undertaken?

It is suggested that schools look at what is publicly available through the usual search engines and websites, such as Google, to undertake a search on a candidate. The candidate's name and any former names, if available, can be entered into the search engine 'Forename/Surname crown court / Forename/Surname magistrates court / Forename/Surname convicted' may provide relevant information.

You could also search for the candidate's on LinkedIn and check who they have identified as previous employers against the employment history they have provided on their application form, along with a comparison of the employment dates stated.

Social media checks should not be undertaken. It would potentially be a breach of data protection to search an individual's social media presence, particularly if that search is done covertly (e.g. by setting up a Facebook account in a pretend name just to look at candidates' info).

Who should undertake the Online Search?

We would advise that anyone involved in the recruitment process should not carry out the online search as they may come across additional information that is not relevant to the process and which the candidate is under no duty to disclose, such as equalities information or protected characteristics such as age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or belief. These are not likely to be relevant to risk or suitability to work with children, which is the purpose of the checks so this information should not be shared with the decision makers in the recruitment process at any point.

This will help to avoid any allegations of impropriety, unfairness, or discrimination in the decision to appoint or reject a particular candidate. The person undertaking the search should know the parameters of what they are looking for and a consistent approach should be taken with all candidates on whom a search is undertaken to avoid any accusations of discrimination or bias.

The person undertaking the online searches should also have an understanding of safeguarding and what they are looking for, where they are looking for information, and be aware that they must only provide information from the searches that may pose a genuine risk.

What to look out for:

This is part of a safeguarding check and the search is purely about whether a candidate is suitable to work with children.

Check for evidence of any criminal convictions or anything else that is specifically of a safeguarding nature that you may consider makes a candidate unsuitable to work with children, for example convictions, discriminatory or offensive comments or inappropriate photos or videos.

Any information that comes to light that may impact upon a candidate's suitability for the post due to it potentially being a safeguarding concern should be given to the recruitment panel for them to discuss with the candidate.

Should you be unsure on how to proceed with any concerns or information that has come to light following the search, you can contact your HR Adviser to discuss whether this information is relevant to the candidate's suitability for the post.

Recording the Search

We would also advise that a written record is kept of any search that is undertaken, together with details e.g. name, post, web addresses, date etc, and this should be recorded together with the outcome of the search i.e. whether there was anything found or not. A template form can be found at the end of this guidance document for this purpose.

Ofsted Inspectors could question schools on whether they have undertaken online searches and documenting the searches would help evidence this.

School Single Central Record

Whilst there is no statutory requirement to record online searches on the School Single Central Record, it may be beneficial to do so, again as evidence for Ofsted.

Any information obtained through such searches would need to be handled in the same way as other recruitment information and in compliance with GDPR and established retention guidelines.

Data Protection

Online searches are being undertaken because statutory safeguarding guidance requires it to be considered, therefore schools do not need a candidate's consent. However applicants should be advised that an online check will be undertaken as part of the recruitment process following shortlisting.

CANDIDATE ONLINE SEARCH

Post Title: _____

In accordance with guidance outlined in Paragraph 220 of KCSIE 2022, an online search has been undertaken on the following candidates:

Name of Candidate	Date Online Search Undertaken	Concerns Identified Yes/No	Date Recruitment Panel Informed

Check undertaken by:

Name:

Position:

Signature:

Date: