

DRIVING FORWARD PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS

THE GENERAL  
TEACHING COUNCIL  
FOR SCOTLAND

# Code of Professionalism and Conduct



[WWW.GTCS.ORG.UK](http://WWW.GTCS.ORG.UK)



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## About this publication

The information contained in this brochure was correct at the time of publication. GTC Scotland cannot be held responsible for any issues arising from any errors or subsequent changes in requirements.

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## About GTCS

The General Teaching Council for Scotland is the world's first independent, self-regulating professional body for teaching. We aim to maintain and enhance teaching standards and promote the teaching profession in Scotland.

GTC Scotland aims to promote equality and diversity in all its activities.

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# Context

GTC Scotland (“GTC Scotland”) is the independent professional body which maintains and enhances teaching standards and promotes and regulates the teaching profession in Scotland. The Council has a duty to regulate teachers in the public interest and, in so doing, is accountable to the public and the profession for maintaining standards and ensuring that teachers are fit to teach<sup>1</sup>.

The protection of children and young people and their educational wellbeing, along with the reputation of, and the public’s trust in, the teaching profession, sits at the heart of GTC Scotland’s fitness to teach regulation. Therefore regulatory measures, which may seem to be punitive in effect, should always be viewed within the context of what is considered necessary to protect.

**1 Further details of the GTC Scotland Fitness to Teach procedures and processes can be found at [www.gtcs.org.uk](http://www.gtcs.org.uk)**

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# The Code – its purpose, scope and status

## **Purpose**

This Code of Professionalism and Conduct sets out the key principles and values for registered teachers in Scotland. In accordance with the general principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and GTC Scotland's wider framework of standards, this Code and commentary states not only to the profession, but also to members of the public, the standard of conduct and competence expected of registered teachers. The Code of Professionalism and Conduct and commentary cannot address every

possible circumstance in which teachers might find themselves. However, it is intended that teachers are mindful of the Code in relation to the judgements which they will be called upon to make in situations which may occur both within and outwith the professional context. Although the behaviours described in this Code will be unthinkable to the vast majority of registered teachers and members of the public, GTC Scotland has a duty to identify them so that the boundaries of professional behaviour and conduct are clear and public trust in teachers is maintained.

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## Scope

This Code applies to fully registered and also, with the exception of Part 3, to provisionally registered teachers in whatever educational context the registered teacher may work. It also applies to all other currently registered teachers, whatever their sector of employment or employment status.

Throughout the Code, where the term “pupil” is used, it refers to learners in the wider sense and therefore includes those being educated in the pre-five, primary, secondary and further education sectors.

## Status

Although this Code replaces the 2008 Code on 2 April 2012, Parts 1 – 4 of the 2008 Code will continue to apply to complaints which are related to periods prior to that date.

This is guidance and not a statutory code; therefore teachers must use their own judgement and common sense in applying the principles to the various situations in which they may find themselves. However, teachers must be aware that a serious breach or series of minor breaches of these principles could lead to action which may result in an adverse fitness to teach finding and imposition of any of the sanctions open to the Council.

Teachers should embrace the notion of personal regulation based on common sense and good professional judgement.

Therefore, the Code and its commentary is not intended to be an exhaustive list of unacceptable or unwise behaviours, but rather it is designed to provide guidance and raise awareness of issues and situations which can potentially arise.

Further information about GTC Scotland's regulatory role, sources of complaint and legislative responsibilities in connection with provisionally registered or fully registered teachers can be found at [www.gtcs.org.uk](http://www.gtcs.org.uk)



# Part 1: Professionalism and maintaining trust in the profession

As a registered teacher:

- 1.1** you should have a knowledge of and maintain the key principles within the Professional Standards, Codes, Professional Advisory Statements and Guidance issued by GTC Scotland, as these may be reviewed and reissued from time to time;
- 1.2** you must maintain appropriate professional boundaries, avoid improper contact or relationships with pupils and respect your unique position of trust as a teacher;
- 1.3** you should avoid situations both within and outwith the professional context which could be in breach of the criminal law, or may call into question your fitness to teach;
- 1.4** you must uphold standards of personal and professional conduct, honesty and integrity so that the public have confidence in you as a teacher and teaching as a profession;
- 1.5** you should be professional, honest and act with integrity in your dealings and correspondence with GTC Scotland, other regulatory (or similar) bodies and employers (including prospective and past);
- 1.6** you should maintain an awareness that as a teacher you are a role model to pupils.

## Commentary

Parents and carers in particular, and the public in general, place a very high degree

of trust in those who are educating pupils, and rely upon teachers to interpret what is right and what is wrong.

Teachers are often called upon to make difficult decisions regarding pupils and therefore, in exercising judgement, you should think very carefully of the implication and potential consequences of the options open to you.

As a teacher, you should also bear in mind how your decision and subsequent action may appear or be interpreted by others not fully aware of all of the circumstances.

## **Pupils**

Teachers should establish professional boundaries, and recognise the negative impact that actual or perceived breaches of these would have upon pupils and the confidence of the public.

With regard to relationships with pupils, you should:

- in managing behaviour:
  - be aware of and adhere to behaviour management protocols and strategies and not harm or use physical violence against a child or pupil in or outwith the educational establishment context;
  - take into account reasonable norms and best practice when conducting interviews with pupils, in a disciplinary context, and have due regard to their age, stage and individual circumstances;
- appreciate fully that the onus is upon you as the teacher and not the pupil to distance yourself from any potentially inappropriate situation;
- avoid sexual contact with or remarks towards a pupil of school age, regardless of the apparent consent of the individual concerned;

- be mindful that professional boundaries can be perceived to extend beyond a pupil's educational establishment leaving date; therefore, in situations of this nature, you should exercise great care and professional judgement, taking into account all the factors involved;
- not attempt to establish an inappropriate relationship with any pupil by means which might include (but are not limited to):
  - communication of a personal nature;
  - engaging in an inappropriate way through the internet or by other means with pupils;
  - sending e-mails or text messages to pupils, of an inappropriate nature.

As a teacher you must:

- not discuss with pupils your own intimate and personal relationships and be mindful to maintain an appropriate balance between formality and informality when you are dealing with pupils;
- take care to avoid becoming personally involved in a pupil's personal affairs;
- be aware of the potential dangers of being alone with a pupil (in particular under 18 years of age) in a private or isolated situation, using common sense and professional judgement to avoid circumstances which are, or could be, perceived to be of an inappropriate nature. This is also the case in connection with social networking websites, outwith the setting of the educational establishment and in subject areas such as music, physical education and drama;
- be mindful that the internet and social networking can quickly blur

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the professional boundary between teacher and pupil. Teachers need to be alert to the risk that actions which might, on the face of it, seem quite innocent, can be misunderstood and misconstrued by others;

- avoid inappropriate communication (including via social networking) with individuals under 18 or in relation to whom you may be in a position of trust or have a professional relationship;
- not by any means or in any circumstances, make, view or access illegal or inappropriate images of children or protected adults;
- be mindful of the negative impact of being under the influence of alcohol in the professional setting.

### **Educational Excursions**

Excursions have an important part to play in the life of pupils, and can greatly enrich the educational experience of pupils taking part.

Physical safety is of prime importance. However, particularly in the residential setting, relationships tend to be less formal and the environment is very different from that in an educational establishment. You should not allow yourself to overstep the professional boundaries and remember that the professional standard of behaviour expected of you on an educational excursion outwith the structure of the normal working day is no different from that of the professional norm.

Accordingly you should ensure, for example, that you:

- have a full knowledge of, and comply with, the procedures and guidelines laid down for these activities by your

educational establishment and the requirements of health and safety;

- are always mindful of the need to maintain an appropriate balance between formality and informality and avoid situations which are or could be reasonably perceived to be of an inappropriate nature.

### **Honesty and Integrity**

The good standing of the teaching profession is at the heart of the regulatory role of GTC Scotland. Therefore as a teacher you must:

- not engage in behaviour of a criminal nature, especially related to sex, dishonesty, firearms, misuse of drugs and violence against a person or property or serious public order offences, which would be of particular concern in regard to a teacher's professional status and fitness to teach;
- be honest and trustworthy, especially avoiding offences such as theft, dishonesty, extortion, fraud or misuse of drugs;
- have due regard to the trust in you as a teacher and therefore act with integrity and honesty in applying for registration and in all your dealings with GTC Scotland, in making declarations and undertakings in professional applications/submissions, in the writing of references for colleagues or pupils and in the conduct of tasks in connection with examinations and/or assessments;
- not knowingly hinder, or refuse to engage with GTC Scotland in the discharge of its regulatory functions;
- be mindful that you have a professional responsibility to ensure that your contact details held by GTC Scotland are correct and up-to-date.





## Part 2: Professional Responsibilities towards Pupils

As a teacher:

- 2.1** you must treat sensitive, personal information about pupils with respect and confidentiality and not disclose it unless required to do so by your employer or by law;
- 2.2** you must be truthful, honest and fair in relation to information you provide about pupils;
- 2.3** you should aim to be a positive role model to pupils and motivate and inspire them to realise their full potential;
- 2.4** you must maintain an up-to-date knowledge and understanding of, implement, and comply with, child and protected adult procedures as they may currently apply in your workplace;
- 2.5** as a member of the children's workforce in Scotland, you should recognise your role as a professional in delivering better outcomes for children and young people;
- 2.6** you must raise any concerns which you may have about the behaviour of any colleague in connection with a child or protected adult, using the appropriate procedures in place;
- 2.7** you should be aware of the general principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, regarding equal treatment, the child's best interests, and giving appropriate weight to the views of the child.

### Commentary

- You should display a sensitive and

positive attitude towards differences among pupils and identify and respond appropriately to those with difficulties in, or barriers to, learning. When necessary, you should seek advice in relation to their additional support needs.

- You should identify and respond appropriately to indicators of the wellbeing and welfare of pupils, including bullying and discrimination, ensuring that their initiative and independent learning are encouraged and nurtured.
- As a teacher, you should have high expectations of and provide realistic challenges for pupils, ensuring that learning tasks are varied in form, differentiated and devised to build confidence in and promote self-worth for all your pupils.
- Pupils of school age spend a large proportion of their lives within the educational setting, and therefore a teacher plays a pivotal role in child protection as they are well placed to see symptoms and signs.
- In keeping with “It’s everyone’s job to make sure I’m all right” and the collaborative approach of “Getting it Right for Every Child”, teachers should keep up-to-date with their employer’s child protection procedures and operate within them.
- The protection of children and protected adults is of the utmost importance. A teacher cannot ignore behaviour of any colleague which he or she may genuinely feel falls short of norms and standards in this regard and such concerns should be raised through the procedures available.



# Part 3: Professional Competence

As a fully registered teacher:

- 3.1** you should maintain and develop your professional practice to ensure you continue to meet the requirements of the Standard for Full Registration which comprise:
- Professional knowledge and understanding;
  - Professional skills and abilities;
  - Professional values and personal commitment.
- 3.2** you should refresh and develop your knowledge and skills through Continuing Professional Development and maintenance of reflective good practice.

## Commentary

The Standard for Full Registration serves three main purposes in that it provides:

- a clear and concise description of the professional qualities and capabilities teachers are expected to develop in the course of induction;
- a professional standard against which reliable and consistent decisions can be made on the fitness of new teachers for full

registration with GTC Scotland;

- a baseline professional standard which will and does apply to fully registered teachers throughout their careers.

The Standard for Full Registration defines the professional standard and the illustrations of professional practice which are organised into the three inter-related aspects of professional development.

## Professional Knowledge and Understanding

The Standard for Full Registration applies to all fully registered teachers and as such you should have:

- A detailed knowledge and understanding of the relevant areas of the pre-school, primary or secondary school curriculum and also an understanding of curriculum development. This should include a broad, critical understanding of the principal features of the education system, policy and practice and a detailed knowledge of sector and professional responsibilities within these.

## Professional Values and Personal Commitment

As a registered teacher you should:

- be able to show in your day-to-day practice a commitment to social justice and inclusion, take responsibility for your own professional learning and development and be an active partner in the communities in which you work.

## Professional Skills and Abilities

As a registered teacher you should be able to:

- plan and implement teaching programmes that match varying pupils' needs, communicate effectively through different media in varying contexts and use varied teaching strategies and resources;
- organise and manage resources and pupil behaviour to achieve safe, orderly and purposeful activity;
- understand the principles of assessment, recording and reporting, and reflect on and act to improve your own professional practice.

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# Part 4: Professionalism towards Colleagues, Parents and Carers

As a teacher:

- 4.1** you should work in a collegiate and co-operative manner with colleagues and members of other relevant professions;
- 4.2** you must treat all colleagues and parents and carers fairly and with respect, without discrimination;
- 4.3** you should not make malicious or unfounded criticisms of, or accusations about, colleagues that may undermine them professionally or in the professional judgements they make;
- 4.4** you should promote good relationships between home and school/college and, as such, respect the role of parents and carers in the learning experience as appropriate;
- 4.5** you should exercise great care when expressing opinions in public about your employer and be mindful of Data Protection Act requirements concerning handling information about parents, carers and pupils.

## **Commentary Colleagues**

- Everyone in the workplace should be able to work in an environment which is free from discrimination and harassment. A teacher should work in a collegiate way, treating all colleagues professionally.

As a teacher you should:

- avoid undermining a colleague by remarks which are or could be perceived as being malicious, unfounded or unprofessional. This is of particular importance when in contact with parents, carers and pupils;
- guard against inappropriate communication with, or behaviour towards, colleagues which is or could be perceived as being of an unprofessional, discriminatory or harassing nature.

## **Parents and Carers**

- Success in the education of pupils is greatly enhanced by the active involvement of their parents or carers or key adults in their lives.
- As appropriate, parents and carers should be seen as vital partners in the learning experience and therefore as a teacher you should:
  - be professional in dealings with parents and carers and avoid making comments, being drawn into inappropriate discussions or divulging confidential information about other pupils, colleagues, or the educational establishment;
  - encourage the involvement of parents and carers as appropriate in the learning experience, welcoming them as active participants in the life of the educational establishment, and working in partnership with it.







## Part 5: Equality and Diversity

In line with GTC Scotland's general duty under the Equality Act 2010, the Council promotes equality and diversity and respects and values difference. GTC Scotland wants to promote an inclusive profession that incorporates people from a range of diverse backgrounds. Through respecting the principle of equal treatment, this will benefit both the teaching profession and pupils alike.

As a teacher you should:

**5.1** engage and work positively with pupils, colleagues, parents and carers in an open, inclusive and respectful way, in line with the law and with

a non-judgemental approach whatever their background, personal circumstances, cultural differences, values and beliefs;

**5.2** help pupils to understand different views, perspectives, and experiences and develop positive relationships both within the educational establishment and in the local community;

**5.3** recognise that you are a role model and therefore should be aware of the potentially serious impact which any demonstration by you of intolerance or prejudice could have upon your standing as a teacher and your fitness to teach.

THE GENERAL  
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GTC Scotland aims to promote equality  
and diversity in all its activities.



**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE**  
Scotland

## Direct weblinks

**Main site:**  
[www.gtcs.org.uk](http://www.gtcs.org.uk)

**Fitness to teach department:**  
[www.gtcs.org.uk/copac](http://www.gtcs.org.uk/copac)

**Probation site for teachers:**  
[www.probationerteacherscotland.org.uk](http://www.probationerteacherscotland.org.uk)

**Registration department:**  
[www.gtcs.org.uk/registration](http://www.gtcs.org.uk/registration)

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