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**Online Searches for Shortlisted Candidates**

**Introduction:**

These were introduced in KCSIE 2022. Paragraph 221 notes: *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.*

**Rationale:**

This change may in part have been introduced due to the case reported in 2019 when a primary school in Oxford employed a Spanish woman as a TA without becoming aware that she had been convicted in Spain for killing a child, despite correctly following safer recruitment procedures: [Oxford school hired murderer Iria Suarez-Gonzalez as teaching assistant - BBC News](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-48661365)

**Requirements:**

It is important to note that the advice does not recommend or require a detailed search of an individual’s social media accounts – this would be intrusive and may come into conflict with employment law and open up an increased potential for discrimination and bias. Instead, this is about:

* Searching for information, which is *publicly available online,* and
* Which *may help identify any incidents or issues that have happened*, … *which the school or college might want to explore with the applicant at interview*.

The school is therefore primarily looking for any information that may give cause for concern and indicate the candidate **may not be suitable to work with children** – for example indications of inappropriate or offensive behaviour, posting offensive images, extreme radical views, and drug or alcohol misuse. Any relevant information discovered could also be compared with information on the candidate’s application form to check for consistency.

In the same way as information held in references needs to be handled very carefully, schools should be mindful of discovering any information which might inappropriately bias the decision making. For example schools may discover one candidate has raised a lot of money for charity, whilst another has lawfully protested against HS2. They may equally find out nothing about another candidate. None of these things should affect the decision making during the recruitment process. Note that any criminal information found via a search engine is still covered by the Ministry of Justice filtering rules – if the conviction / caution would be filtered, it should not be discussed with the candidate and cannot be considered. If in doubt, seek further advice from your HR Provider.

**Guidance for Schools:**

It is noted that KCSIE says schools ‘should consider’ undertaking such checks. Whilst this is not the same as ‘should undertake’, guidance from the Safer Recruitment Consortium notes *it is difficult to think of many (if any) circumstances in which you might decide not to undertake the checks*. Schools are therefore advised to ensure that:

* Shortlisted candidates are made aware that an online search will be carried out, as per the guidance in KCSIE.
* The search is carried out for all shortlisted candidates by someone who will not be on the recruiting panel.
* Any information recorded is factual and does not introduce personal bias.

Whilst such searches could take up a large amount of time, we advise that searches should take no longer than 15-20 minutes maximum for each candidate, unless significant relevant information is found within this timescale.

Schools may wish to use a template form (an example is available) to record any information found and provide evidence that such a check has been undertaken.