

THE RIGHT TO DISCONNECT

The Maltese Context



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA
MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION,
SPORT, YOUTH, RESEARCH
AND INNOVATION



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The Maltese social context

A group of people are sitting at an outdoor restaurant by the sea at sunset. The scene is warm and social, with people engaged in conversation and laughter. The background shows a coastal town with buildings and a small boat on the water.

- Over the past twenty years, most Maltese people have transitioned to the use of mobile devices that allow **instant communication**.
- The facility of receiving emails and messages through Messenger, WhatsApp, Teams and other chat systems has ensured instant messaging and created the **social expectation of immediate replies**.
- **Social boundaries have increasingly dissipated**. Everyone has become more accessible and expected to be accessible, at all hours and with immediacy.

Directive 4.2 Communication Policy

STANDARDS FOR SERVICE OF EXCELLENCE OFFERED BY THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION TO THE PUBLIC AND TO PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

*Issued on 3 October 2022 by the
Principal Permanent Secretary in terms
of the Public Administration Act*

- Link:
<https://publicservices.gov.mt/en/people/Documents/Directives/Directive-4.2.pdf>
- The primary aim of this Directive is to address the delivery of service by ensuring that internal and external clients have easy access to seamless services offered by the Public Administration, whilst ensuring that such services are of a high-quality standard and delivered on time.
- This Directive also strives to address accountability, which is a fundamental concept based on honesty and integrity, whilst ensuring loyalty towards the customers.



The quality service standards set out by this Directive apply to:

- a) **Communication in writing** - including traditional and electronic mail;
- b) Communication by means of **telephony** and in **person**;
- c) Communication on **social media**;
- d) **Live Chats** and **Chat bot**;
- e) Maintaining **appointments** and managing queues and reception areas;
- f) Providing **information** and addressing complaints;
- g) Services **delivered online**.



Modern Work Practices for all Public Officers

What are modern work practices and what is their aim?

- Modern work practices are improved working methods that offer more flexibility at work.
- The Public Service offers a range of modern work practices which are: reduced hours, flexi-time, flexi-week, remote working and extended remote working.
- Manual on Work-life Balance:
https://publicservice.gov.mt/Media/PSMC%20Documents/Manual_on_Work-Life_Balance_Measures_3.pdf
- Guidelines for modern work practices -
<https://publicservices.gov.mt/en/people/Pages/FAQeng.aspx>



RESPECTFUL DIALOGUE



CLEAR EMAILS



MEETING FEEDBACK

Overarching Principles

- The Public Service, **as a model employer**, whilst ensuring its obligation to provide services of excellence to the citizens, nevertheless commits itself to manage any adverse effects that might lead to a work life imbalance. In this light the Malta Public Service has committed itself to comply with any regulations in force from time to time.
- In this context, this policy aimed **to establish boundaries regulating how and when official communications are made, with a view to safeguarding employee wellbeing whilst always ensuring quality service.**



Two types of Communication

1. Dissemination of Official Communication e.g. official circulars, internal memos, Standard Operating Procedures, or other formal instructions – **Monday to Thursday (excluding public holidays).**
2. Other communication such as e-mails, phone calls and text messaging systems, including traditional SMS, Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp or any other software.



Exemptions to this policy


- Headships
- Assistant Directorship positions
- Senior Management
- Health and Safety
- Workplace security
- Events and Logistics



Other provisos

1. Employees in receipt of a disturbance allowance
2. Employees on stand-by / on call
3. The importance of regular team communication





The Malta Chamber
– **2021 Proposal** –
The right to disconnect

<https://www.maltachamber.org.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ef70b2e5-c26e-41f9-9bad-9ac26b64673f.pdf>



RIGHT TO DISCONNECT



An Employers Guide
for a Productive
Culture that
safeguards Employees
wellness

- Work-life balance policies by employers
- Hours of work
- Outside of Regular Business hours
- Extraordinary circumstances
- Regular breaks
- Meetings not during breaks
- Rights & Responsibilities & expectations of employees

The Union perspective

- Educators already have **limitations** when compared with other Public servants, given their working hours. Educators cannot take flexi-hours, do remote working or even take time-off so easily.
- Communications should be **during working hours**. Periods of holiday, weekends and unsocial hours should be respected.
- **Only official channels** of communication should be used. WhatssApp and Facebook messaging should be discontinued for work-related communications.



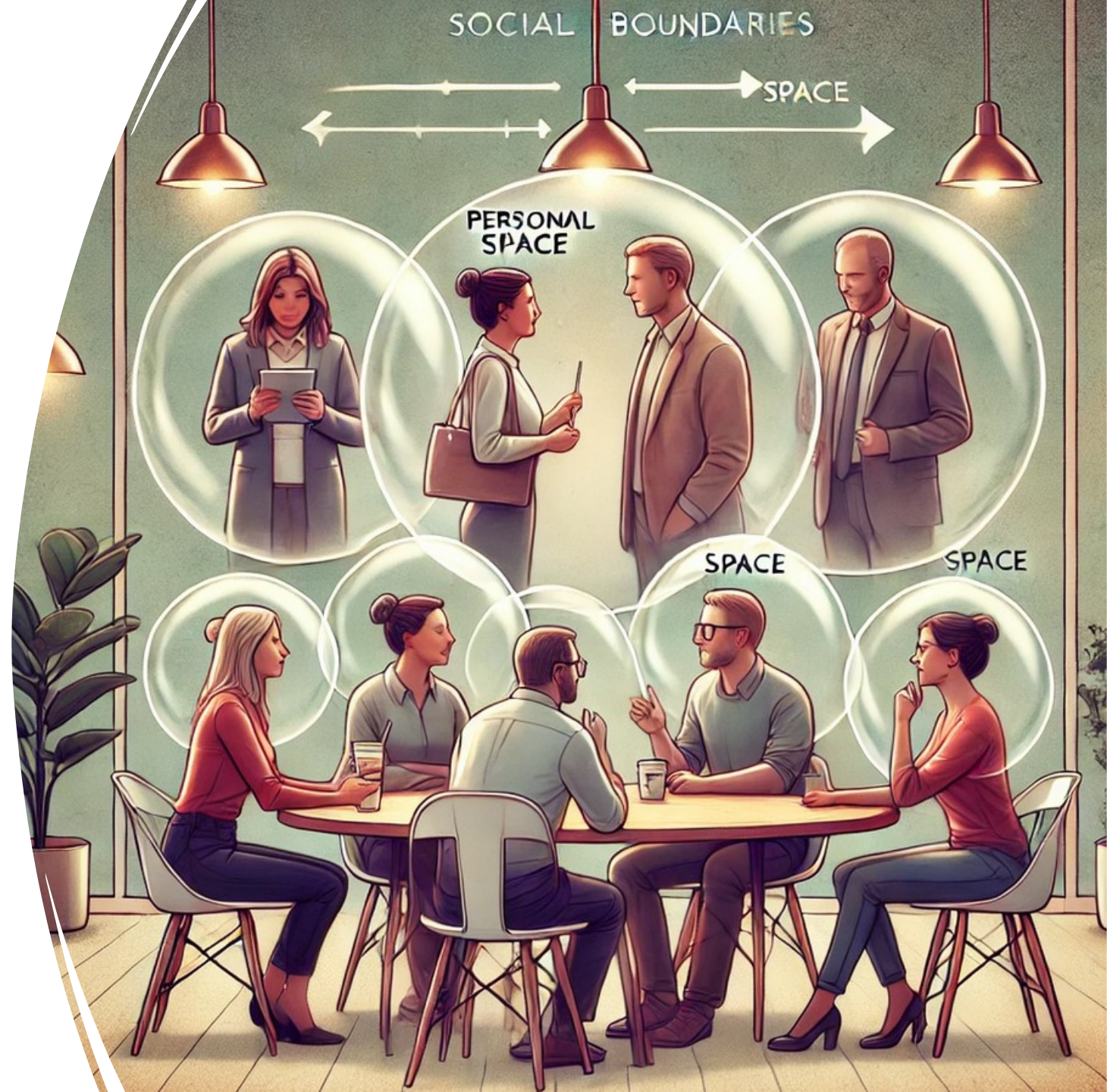
The Union perspective

- To disconnect from communication is **not the same** as to disconnect from work. Educators have the right to non-contact time.
- The right to disconnect means that **one is not obliged to respond** to emails during unsocial hours.
- A communications allowance can be a positive incentive but can also be misused.



The Union perspective

- There should be **clear boundaries** on when, how and in what way parents, students and superiors can communicate with educators should be established.
- The communication system should have **in-built protections** that stop emails and messages from being received during unsocial hours.
- OR there should be **deterrents** against sending emails/messages during unsocial hours.



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