

HELPDESK RESPONSE 147

Building an Acceptable Use Policy

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Author Rabia Tanweer
Natalie Wyss

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Reviewers Caitlin Moss

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AUP	Acceptable use policy
MoE	Ministry of Education
RUP	Responsible use policy

1. Introduction

An acceptable use policy (AUP) aims to define how digital and technological tools and services (both devices and ICT services) should be used in or by education systems and actors. Such policies also outline the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of users, as well as possible ramifications for uses deemed unacceptable. In doing so, AUPs attempt to promote good practice and responsible, safe use of the internet and digital technologies. An AUP features six main elements ([↑ Education World, n.d.](#)):

- An introduction or preamble
- A policy statement
- An acceptable uses section
- An unacceptable uses section
- A violations / sanctions section
- A user agreement

Best practices in developing an AUP include explaining to the user why an AUP is important, framing guidelines in positive rather than punitive ways, ensuring alignment with national and school policies, and blending principles from responsible use policies. In addition, input and insight from all actors who will be impacted or involved in an AUP should be sought throughout the development process. The AUP development process should involve the following key steps ([↑ Webswise, 2016](#)).

1. Establishing and coordinating structures
2. Review and research
3. Preparation of draft policy
4. Circulation / consultation
5. Ratification and communication
6. Implementation
7. Monitoring
8. Reviewing, evaluating, and revising

This brief discusses these key considerations and steps in greater detail. There are limited examples of AUPs used in Africa. However, learnings from global examples are shared. These examples have key features that can be applied to the development of new AUPs. The examples and templates included in this brief can be adapted to suit other contexts by taking into account the scope of the AUP, its intended objectives, relevant national and school level policies, and school values.

1.1. Purpose of this document

This document was produced in response to a request from the World Bank Innovation in Education team that was submitted to the EdTech Hub Helpdesk in October 2022. The World Bank team requested support for their continued work leading device (tablet and laptop) procurement and rollout activities for schools in Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, and Africa more broadly. The contextualised guidance in this document includes:

- A definition and explanation of AUPs
- Recommendations for building and implementing EdTech-specific AUPs
- A step-by-step guide to developing AUPs
- Examples of AUPs related to EdTech

2. What is an AUP?

Among diverse policies related to EdTech, acceptable use policies (AUPs) serve to clarify expectations and regulations related to the use of EdTech. AUPs are contextually-specific policies that define how digital and technological tools and services should be used in or by education systems and actors. These policies address the rights, privileges, responsibilities, and ramifications associated with the use of technology in education spaces and for educational purposes.

These policies are quite diverse both in terms of what kinds of education technology they discuss and the actors with whom they facilitate agreements. Despite this diversity, however, AUPs are often guided by similar objectives, including:

- Supporting teaching, learning, and improved education outcomes through access to digital resources.
- Promoting responsible digital citizenship, including safeguarding against dangerous content and prioritising safety.
- Facilitating alignment with other educational and technologically oriented priorities and policies (at national and school levels).
- Clarifying rules and sanctions related to the use of EdTech.
- Providing clear and accessible guidance on best practices for all EdTech users ([↑HiddenApp, n.d.](#)).

2.1. How AUPs support education systems

AUPs offer education and policy leaders an opportunity to shape the uptake and use of EdTech by helping education systems:

- **Stay up to date** – by establishing education policies and practices that keep pace with the rapidly evolving EdTech field, including leveraging opportunities, addressing and adapting to challenges, and prioritising digital safety within the education community.
- **Manage devices** – by ensuring EdTech devices (personal and school- / government-issued) are managed, maintained, and secured.

- **Facilitate EdTech integration** – by supporting access to and meaningful use of EdTech tools, platforms, and methodologies for administrators, educators, and students.
- **Prioritise digital safety and citizenship** – by developing safe digital environments that are conducive to teaching and learning, addressing challenges related to harmful / precarious use of technology or digital behaviour, securing online / digital systems and networks, and facilitating healthy digital citizenship for educators and students.
- **Strategise for preparedness and contingency planning** – by establishing forward-looking plans to ensure education continuity in response to various eventualities (i.e., loss of devices, natural disaster, school closures, etc.) ([↑HiddenApp, n.d.](#)).

2.2. What EdTech do AUPs apply to?

AUPs are as diverse as the EdTech tools and platforms they apply to. Therefore, AUPs generally seek to address a wide range of aspects related to the use of digital technologies, including (but not limited to):

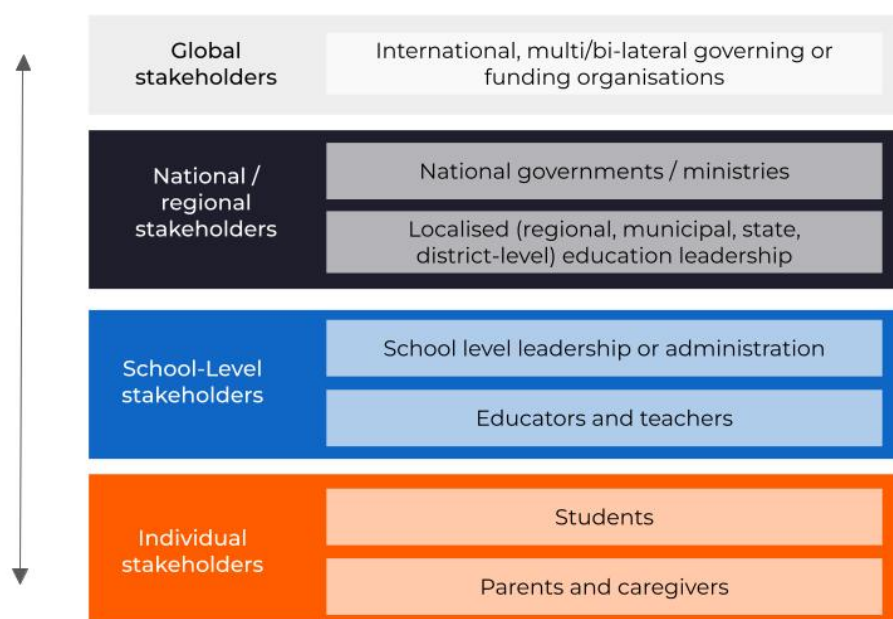
EdTech hardware	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Computers and laptops■ Tablets■ Smartphones, mobile phones■ Televisions■ Radios■ Projectors and smartboards■ Accessory tools (i.e., headphones, charging cables, printers, projectors, etc.)
EdTech software	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Operating systems■ Software and applications
Online / digitally-based tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Educational materials and repositories, including stored texts and data files■ Email, messaging, and other communication platforms and technologies■ Databases■ Digital media■ Digitised information and platforms
Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Network / internet access

AUPs should speak to all EdTech tools that will be necessary to carry out an initiative. For example, if teachers are provided with laptops to access online teaching materials, the AUP to which teachers agree, should cover the laptops, internet use and access, and online teaching materials.

2.3. Who are AUPs created for?

AUPs often shape an agreement or set of understandings between an EdTech ‘provider’ (i.e., actors and/or institutions who facilitate access to EdTech) and a user (i.e., actors and/or institutions who utilise or facilitate the use of EdTech). As described in [Figure 1](#), AUPs can establish shared understandings between providers and users ranging from bilateral and multilateral leadership organisations to individual users.

Figure 1. *The various strata of stakeholders typically involved in EdTech AUPs*



Notably, AUPs typically do not often cover all stakeholders described in [Figure 1](#) — for example, AUPs are commonly shared between national-level stakeholders and school districts or between teachers and students and are less common between ministries of education (MoEs) and students. However, multiple institutions can be positioned as the ‘providers’ (i.e., a multilateral funder partnered with an MoE can create an agreement with school districts). In many instances, these kinds of provider partnerships help bolster the credibility and contextual relevance of an AUP. For example, the contextually relevant authority of an education commissioner

may be perceived as much, if not weightier, to a teacher than the more abstract significance of a multilateral funder. If and when providers listed in the global or national-level strata of [Figure 1](#) develop AUPs for use with individuals in the more localised strata, it is beneficial to partner with leaders in strata that are closer (and more relevant to) users. It can also be important that representatives from all parties involved endorse an AUP. For example, seeing that a government official *and* head teacher have signed an agreement can help convey the importance of an AUP to an individual teacher.

3. Key considerations when creating an AUP

There is a wide range of publicly available examples of AUPs, templates, and guidance documents. Across this body of guidance, common considerations for education-related AUP development include those identified below on content, accessibility and equity, policy alignment, and the development process.

Importantly, the relevance of these insights is dependent on a variety of contextual factors, including who is developing an AUP, the geographic and political context, contextual EdTech opportunities and challenges, and the central goals of an EdTech initiative.

3.1 Content considerations

The content of AUPs should:

1. Create a clear, concise, and holistic definition of EdTech and include an explicit explanation of which EdTech tools, platforms, or modalities a specific AUP applies to.
2. Clarify why an AUP is important to the user and/or school and frame guidelines in a positive (rather than punitive) way. For example, in addition to the objectives outlined in the previous section, AUPs can emphasise the importance of following the points below:
 - Support learning through access to digital resources.
 - Protect users from inappropriate content.
 - Promote online safety.
 - Clarify rules and sanctions.
 - Provide best practice guidelines.
3. Develop distinct sections to guide user practice with and usage of policy and EdTech tools.
4. Align with and work in service of national, regional, district, or school timelines, objectives, and budgets. AUPs should also be aligned with schools' academic philosophies, strategies, and focuses.

3.1.2. Blending AUPs with principles from responsible use policies

More recent guidance around AUPs suggests that traditional AUPs be blended with principles from responsible use policies (RUPs). While RUPs serve a similar purpose to AUPs, they reframe requirements into responsibilities ([↑HiddenApp, n.d.](#)). While traditional AUPs are framed as lists of “what you cannot do”, RUPs are framed as “this is the behaviour that is expected of you.” RUPs are user-centred and typically involve “I” statements such as “I treat school equipment with care and respect.” Blending an AUP with a RUP might look like placing greater emphasis on responsible use, digital citizenship, and values. In addition, in line with the broader aims of policies, AUPs should strive to clarify general guidelines rather than more specified standards.

3.1.3. Key elements of AUPs

In general, AUPs have six key elements:

1. A preamble which explains why the policy is needed and what its goals are.
2. A policy statement that identifies which technologies are covered.
3. An acceptable uses section.
4. An unacceptable uses section that provides clear and specific examples.
5. A violations / sanctions section that outlines the consequences of breaches in the policy.
6. An agreement which students and parents / guardians sign in acknowledgement of the policy.

3.2. Accessibility and equity

AUPs should be developed with the needs of the intended audience in mind. Users’ levels of familiarity with the tech tools should always be considered. Keep in mind the realities of digital divides that impact user access to and comfort with EdTech tools.

Both literacy levels and the age of users should be considered (particularly when students are the primary users targeted by the AUPs). AUPs should also be written in contextually relevant and accessible vocabulary and avoid the use of jargon or legalese. To do this, it may be useful to frame AUPs as accessible “EdTech value statements” rather than formal policy documents. AUPs should also be translated into languages that are most relevant to users (including languages spoken in students’ homes).

3.3. Policy alignment

AUPs should ensure alignment with national and school policies, especially those related to digital safety and citizenship. AUPs should prioritise user privacy and safety. Where applicable, AUPs should also agree with any relevant insurance policies, liability agreements or restrictions, or terms of service.

4. Development process

Common guidance on AUP development processes tends to include a general set of steps or stages described in [Figure 2](#). Acknowledging contextualised factors associated with AUPs, these stages seek to inform (rather than prescribe) a generalised path for developing a successful AUP.

Figure 2. *Typical stages or steps involved in AUP development*



These stages typically include the following procedures, actions, or goals:

Establishing and coordinating structures

- Define a leadership group and supporting systems / structures to develop and implement an AUP.
- Ensure that all stakeholders involved in the AUP (from all relevant strata shown in [Figure 1](#)) are represented in these groups or systems.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities for the various individuals and organisations represented.

Review and research

- Carry out a scan of all national policies that pertain to topics covered in an AUP, especially including:
 - National education, education technology, and ICT policies

- Teaching Council codes of conduct
- National privacy policies (especially related to data protection and digital safety)
- Child rights, protections, and safeguarding policies and statements
- Copyright acts
- Assess existing school policies to ensure alignment including:
 - School digital learning plans
 - Existing liability and warranty agreements
 - School value agreements
 - School codes of conduct
- Review example AUPs that align with the current needs and goals to understand effective approaches and best practices.
- Review guidance and tools related to child online protection ([↑Mazari & Kaye, 2022](#)).

Preparation of draft policy

- Review the above key considerations on developing AUPs as well as selected global examples (below).
- Using existing templates, amend the AUP to suit the needs of the school or programme. These contexts will influence the approach adopted. An AUP may include, for example:
 - Student agreement form
 - Parent / guardian agreement form
 - Parent / guardian information letters
 - Teacher information letters
 - Teacher / staff AUP
 - Teacher / staff agreement form
- Ensure that drafted policy aligns and refers to national and school policies, where relevant.
- Consider drafting / contextualising guidance for children, parents, and educators related to online safety that can be shared in tandem with the AUP. Determine which, if any, filtering tools will be used (web and content filters, content monitoring, etc.).
- Review within the established leadership group before finalising the draft policy to be circulated with wider audiences and stakeholders.

Circulation / consultation

- Circulate the draft policy and consult with school staff, students, parents / guardians, board of management / trustees, and any other stakeholders (including those at the national, regional, and global levels, where appropriate).
- Amend the draft policy, as necessary, in light of the consultation process.

Ratification and communication

- Present the policy to the board of management / trustees for ratification.
- Establish a plan for implementing AUPs.
 - This should include circulation to all parents / guardians and students, including new entrants.
 - A plan for receiving questions and feedback on the AUP should also be developed.
- Communicate the ratified policy to other members of the school community.

Implementation

- Implement the provisions of the policy.
- Teachers, parents, and students should be directed to ask any questions or share any concerns with a specific point person.

Monitoring

- Any and all questions, feedback, and issues should be logged. It is important to develop a plan for how these issues will be identified, recorded, and reviewed regularly.
 - This involves identifying a person or parties responsible for collecting documentation and reviewing.
 - When and how often should the implementation of the AUP be monitored?
- Monitoring methods may include:
 - Asking teachers to log the use of devices and noting any and all instances of misuse or damage of technology.
 - Where software allows, extensive logs of systems and activities on

the network can be kept, accessed, and reviewed (if needed).

Review, evaluation and revision

- Review and evaluate the impact of the policy regularly to ensure it is always relevant and current.
- As mentioned, the AUP should be consistently monitored through the documentation of any issues or feedback.
 - It may also be useful to seek additional input from students and teachers via surveys and/or interviews (if needed).

4.1 Stakeholders' involvement in the process

When developing an AUP, input and insights from all actors who will be impacted or involved in an AUP should be sought. This includes national / local education leaders, school administrators and staff, teachers, students, and parents / caregivers. This is also true for reviewing and improving AUPs.

Regular review and iterations ensure that AUPs remain current and relevant. For example, following the Covid-19 pandemic, AUPs may need to include provisions related to remote learning that previously may not have been included, such as use at home, offline functionality, and more. Stakeholders should also engage in the processes of monitoring, evaluating, and updating the AUPs. Furthermore, any changes made should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders.

It is also essential to ensure that the AUP covers all stakeholders who may have access to the AUPs, even if they are not the targeted users. AUPs should be agreed to and signed by everyone who will have access to the EdTech tools the policy covers. For instance, if students might take a tablet home, parents / caregivers should also be covered by and asked to sign the AUP.

5. Learning from examples

This review found limited publicly available examples of AUPs from across Africa; therefore, available global examples are also explored below.

Title & Link	Acceptable Usage Policy (↑Bishops Diocesan College, no date)
Geography	Cape Town, South Africa
Purpose	The purpose of this AUP is to encourage and extend the use of technology in schools in constructive and educative ways while also limiting or containing the possibilities of destructive or counterproductive use.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Distinct policies for laptops and mobile devices. ■ An outline of how equipment should not be used. ■ A strong deference to teachers on when and how technology should be used in the classroom. ■ Norms of behaviour, drawn from South African law and school values and norms (addresses concerns related to language use, pornography, bullying and harassment, plagiarism, etc.). ■ Expectations of pupils, including that pupils will use only their own account / password, will conserve space (they should delete unnecessary e-mail or other materials), and should not download or install any commercial software. ■ A monitoring section which outlines that all internet activities are logged, monitored, and archived by the school's IT department. All activities, files, and communications may be reviewed. ■ A warning that breaches in this policy will result in disciplinary action.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ An agreement to be signed by both learners and their parents.
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Title & Link	Acceptable Use Policy (↑Hollingworth, 2018)
Geography	United Kingdom
Purpose	This acceptable use policy contains a policy for teachers and staff as well as a student acceptable use policy. The purpose of the student policy is to inform students of conditions that must be followed when using school and personal ICT devices and accounts. The purpose of the staff policy is to protect school networks, equipment, and school data and also protect the school and its employees from activities that might expose them to legal action from other parties.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Guidelines for staff to ensure the physical security of ICT equipment ■ General conditions of use for staff ■ National guidance and legislation to be aware of ■ A reminder for teachers on data security responsibilities ■ Examples and consequences of breaches of this policy for teachers, outlined by minor, moderate, and severe breaches ■ An outline of acceptable and unacceptable uses by students ■ Examples of sanctions against students if the acceptable use policy is breached ■ Parent and student consent form ■ Legislation on misusing ICT as well as guidance on using ICT safely

Title & Link	Technology Acceptable Use Agreement (↑Ridgewood Public Schools, no date)
Geography	United States
Purpose	The purpose is to inform parents and students of acceptable use of technology tools and the internet.
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Clear explanation of which technology equipment students will have access to and for what purposes■ Indication that the school is compliant with relevant legislation (related to technology protection measures)■ A note that parents and students will be educated on how to properly use technology throughout the year■ Student technology agreement terms (that outline student responsibilities, expectations, acceptable and unacceptable uses)■ An outline of possible consequences of violations of terms■ An agreement to be signed by both students and parents

6. Contextualising AUPs

As every school and programme is different, AUPs should be contextualised based on things like size, content, language and how they are communicated. Things to consider when contextualising AUPs include:

- The scope of technology use
 - Begin by mapping the technology
 - Depending on the issues at hand, different policies or policy sections may be needed. For example, one AUP may divide technology use into multiple categories, such as use of school devices, use of personal devices, security and safety practices, online behaviour, and learning at home.
- Objectives of the AUP
 - To define the objectives of your AUP, questions to explore include:
 - What is the ideal end result of the AUP?
 - How do we want technology to develop our pedagogy?
 - What are the main problems relating to tech and behaviour that we experience or foresee experiencing?
 - How should the AUP address online safety concerns?
- National and school policies
 - AUPs should be contextualised to ensure alignment with educational and technologically oriented priorities and policies at both the national and school level
- School or programme values
 - Values are unique to each individual school or programme.
 - How do these values link to the AUP?
 - What behaviours should the AUP encourage?
 - How can the AUP foster a culture of ownership?

7. Recommendations for ensuring compliance with AUPs

Although very few resources highlight best practices for ensuring compliance with AUPs, key elements for ensuring compliance are that users:

- understand the AUP
- value the technology and the activities for which it is being used
- consistently review and remind themselves of the AUP and its contents.

Familiarisation with the AUP can be accomplished by, for example, giving users a brief quiz to ensure that users have read and understood the policy ([↑Strickland, 2020](#)). Knowing that there will be a quiz may encourage participants to read the AUP thoughtfully and ask any questions they may have.

Several EdTech Hub colleagues who have been involved in technology dissemination projects were consulted about how best to ensure compliance with AUPs, and, specifically, how best to prevent or minimise loss and damage to hardware. Many emphasised that the best way to prevent loss and damage of devices is to ensure that the users the devices. EdTech implementers can begin by working with users to identify how the technology can be used to benefit them. Including users in the development of acceptable uses avoids the risk that users do not see the value in the EdTech that is being introduced.

The benefits of the respective technology that will be disseminated should be emphasised not only at initial onboarding onto the technology but within the AUP and beyond. For example, in a project in which school staff receive technology, messaging from district officers to school staff should emphasise the value of the technology shared, specifically how it has and will continue to benefit the staff, learners, and the school.

To ensure that users remember and continue to adhere to the AUP, users should be regularly reminded of the policy's existence and be directed to review the policy periodically. Saving the AUP to the home screen of the

device(s) covered by the AUP is also key to ensuring the AUP is accessible for users to refer back to.

8. Conclusion

AUPs simultaneously address issues such as the responsible and permitted use of digital and technical tools and services, the secure storage and maintenance of devices, and online safety. As a result, they serve as a useful tool to promote good stewardship and shared understanding of technology in education settings. AUPs, thus, are key to the integration of EdTech as they facilitate access to and meaningful use of EdTech tools.

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