# Edinburgh education executive cleared over controversial emails citing cocaine and strippers



An Edinburgh-based education executive has been absolved of any wrongdoing after allegations surfaced regarding his unprofessional email exchanges, which included references to cocaine and strippers. Tom Crombie, 40, was accused of 'fraudulent misrepresentation' and gross misconduct linked to his communications with a senior executive during negotiations to sell his company, My Online Schooling, for £9 million to Inspired Education Group.

Crombie's defence hinged on the assertion that his emails, which allegedly showcased drug and alcohol use, were merely jokes in a style reminiscent of the 2013 film "The Wolf of Wall Street.” This claim was supported by Judge Joanna Smith, who stated that the exchanges represented "a minuscule proportion" of the pair’s correspondence over a two-year period. The judge observed that the emails illustrated a form of "letting off steam" rather than indicative of any real misconduct.

In one particularly controversial email, Crombie wrote, "Who nose how busy London will be this week... Weather looking cooler next week and possible snow. Looking like that fine powder type," a reference many interpreted as a euphemism for cocaine. Another email suggested an evening filled with "C & S [cocaine and strippers] till we leave (in body bags)." Crombie defended these remarks, explaining that he was drawing parallels to the film's plot—depicting two businessmen caught up in illegal activities.

While Inspired Education Group described the emails as "highly offensive, obscene, vulgar, racist, sexist and discriminatory," Judge Smith dismissed these claims, asserting that they did not demonstrate actual drug use or misconduct linked to the business. Rather, they reflected a misguided attempt at humour among friends. The judge noted, “The mere fact of sending an inappropriate or unprofessional message from a company email address does not itself constitute gross misconduct.”

Inspired Education Group acquired My Online Schooling in late 2022, a strategic move aimed at consolidating their position within the online education sector. Founded in 2016 by Crombie, My Online Schooling offers interactive British curriculum education to students across more than 80 countries. The acquisition was a significant milestone for both parties, as Inspired sought to enhance its online offerings and improve educational outcomes for its diverse student base.

However, the incident highlights broader concerns in the online education landscape. Discussions surrounding customer experiences with My Online Schooling have revealed mixed reviews, with some parents expressing dissatisfaction regarding teacher turnover and the school's management of sensitive issues such as racism. Such scrutiny reflects an overarching challenge within the burgeoning online education sector, which is often characterised by high-stakes financial transactions and the complexities of maintaining professional integrity in an evolving digital marketplace.

In a climate where online learning is rapidly gaining traction, the implications of Crombie’s case extend beyond personal accountability to the standards and expectations governing educational institutions. As the digital education space continues to expand, it remains crucial for stakeholders to navigate the thin line between informal camaraderie and professional responsibility, ensuring that ethical practices are upheld while fostering an engaging learning environment.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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2. <https://www.inspirededu.com/news/inspired-education-extends-leadership-position-through-acquisition-my-online-schooling> - In November 2022, Inspired Education Group, a global leader in premium schools, acquired My Online Schooling, the second-largest online British curriculum school after King’s InterHigh. Founded in 2016 by Tom Crombie, My Online Schooling provides interactive British online education to students in over 80 nations. The acquisition aims to enhance online education offerings and foster improved experiences and outcomes for the international learning community at Inspired’s online and physical schools.
3. <https://www.welltrainedmind.com/topic/687200-any-experience-with-uk-specific-online-schools-myonlineschooling-cambridge-home-school-etc> - A discussion on the Well-Trained Mind Community forum where users share experiences and opinions about UK-specific online schools, including My Online Schooling and Cambridge Home School. One user expressed dissatisfaction with My Online Schooling, citing issues such as high teacher turnover and concerns about the school's handling of racism. The user recommended considering other online schools like Net-School for a better experience.
4. <https://crooksandliars.com/karoli/philly-online-schools-head-charged-with-corrupti> - An article from Crooks and Liars reporting on the founder of Pennsylvania's largest charter school, PA Cyber, being charged with fraud for allegedly funneling $8 million of the school's funds into personal companies and holdings. The indictment details how Nicholas Trombetta, the CEO, used taxpayer money to purchase personal assets and directed employees to make political contributions, which were reimbursed from the school's funds.
5. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/how-online-learning-companies-bought-americas-schools/> - An article from The Nation discussing how online learning companies have influenced American education. It highlights the role of lobbyists for virtual school companies in embedding themselves within conservative infrastructures and promoting virtual education. The piece also mentions the involvement of organizations like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and the State Policy Network (SPN) in advocating for online education policies.
6. <https://archive.hightimes.com/article/1975/12/1/cocaine-confidential> - An article from High Times magazine titled 'Cocaine Confidential' published in December 1975. The piece provides an in-depth look at the cocaine trade, its impact on society, and the individuals involved. It offers insights into the culture surrounding cocaine use and distribution during that period.
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