# Education boss cleared over drug and sexual jokes in work emails linked to £9m stake sale



An education executive from Edinburgh has been cleared of wrongdoing after using his work email to share inappropriate jokes referencing drugs and sexuality. Tom Crombie, 40, recently found himself at the High Court in London, facing serious allegations including fraudulent misrepresentation and gross misconduct. These charges stemmed from exchanges with a senior executive as they negotiated a £9 million stake sale of Crombie's company, My Online Schooling, to the Inspired Education Group, which serves over 90,000 students across 27 countries.

The emails in question, which prominently featured references to cocaine and strippers, were described by Inspired Education as "highly offensive, obscene, vulgar, racist, sexist, and discriminatory." They argued that the disturbing content warranted a significant reduction in the valuation of the stake, potentially costing Crombie about £4.5 million. However, Crombie’s defence asserted that his comments were meant as banter inspired by the film "The Wolf of Wall Street," which features a narrative rich in excess and moral ambiguity.

The emails showcased a rather cavalier attitude towards professional communication. One particularly eyebrow-raising message included a reference to "fine powder type," suggesting an understanding of drug culture while maintaining a tone of jest. Crombie defended his statements by comparing his conduct to that of characters from the notorious Martin Scorsese film, which portrays the risqué lifestyles of stockbrokers living in the fast lane of financial deceit. He likened the ongoing dialogue between himself and the executive to a long-running joke about their lives, contrasting it with the film’s depiction of hedonistic excess.

Ultimately, Mrs Justice Joanna Smith ruled in Crombie’s favour, labelling the email exchanges as a "minuscule proportion" of their overall communication over two years. She noted that while the exchanges were undoubtedly immature, they did not constitute gross misconduct. “The mere fact of sending an inappropriate or unprofessional message from a company email address does not itself constitute gross misconduct," she commented, indicating that the context of the emails mattered significantly in her judgement.

The case raises broader questions about workplace conduct and the boundaries of professional communication in the context of humour. While light-hearted banter can foster camaraderie among colleagues, it also poses risks, particularly when it ventures into offensive or reckless territory. This incident echoes past critiques of "The Wolf of Wall Street," where the film’s representation of women and its glorification of toxic masculinity have drawn scrutiny. It prompts discussions about how such media influences real-world behaviour and attitudes towards arrogance and impropriety in business environments.

Crombie's legal victory does not absolve him of the light shone upon the cultural implications of a workplace that might casually normalise such banter, yet it does illustrate the complexities surrounding intentions and interpretations in professional settings. The judge concluded that the emails reflected "light-hearted, rank goofing-off" rather than genuine misconduct, illuminating a grey area in the interpretation of professional expectations versus personal friendship in business communications.

As the ramifications of this case ripple through the education and corporate sectors, it serves as a cautionary tale about the fine line between humour and propriety in a rapidly evolving professional landscape.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14745723/Education-boss-e-mails-cocaine-strippers-cleared-wrongdoing-Wolf-Wall-Street.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.law360.com/articles/1693930/ex-ceo-says-cocaine-emails-were-wolf-of-wall-street-jokes)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14745723/Education-boss-e-mails-cocaine-strippers-cleared-wrongdoing-Wolf-Wall-Street.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://uproxx.com/filmdrunk/legal-roundup-suits-law-birthday-see/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14745723/Education-boss-e-mails-cocaine-strippers-cleared-wrongdoing-Wolf-Wall-Street.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://time.com/archive/7115352/what-the-wolf-of-wall-street-is-missing-the-women/), [[5]](https://belfort45.rssing.com/chan-4541066/all_p1.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14745723/Education-boss-e-mails-cocaine-strippers-cleared-wrongdoing-Wolf-Wall-Street.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.law360.com/articles/1693930/ex-ceo-says-cocaine-emails-were-wolf-of-wall-street-jokes), [[6]](https://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/wolf-of-wall-street-not-actually-pro-financial-fraudquaaludes-leo-and-marty-insist/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14745723/Education-boss-e-mails-cocaine-strippers-cleared-wrongdoing-Wolf-Wall-Street.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.law360.com/articles/1693930/ex-ceo-says-cocaine-emails-were-wolf-of-wall-street-jokes), [[3]](https://time.com/archive/7115352/what-the-wolf-of-wall-street-is-missing-the-women/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14745723/Education-boss-e-mails-cocaine-strippers-cleared-wrongdoing-Wolf-Wall-Street.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.law360.com/articles/1693930/ex-ceo-says-cocaine-emails-were-wolf-of-wall-street-jokes> - An ex-CEO of an online school denied misconduct allegations after using his work email to discuss cocaine and make vulgar remarks about women, claiming he was making 'Wolf of Wall Street' jokes. The company had accused him of fraudulent misrepresentation and gross misconduct, but the CEO's defense was upheld by a judge, who found the emails to be light-hearted banter between friends and not evidence of actual misconduct.
3. <https://time.com/archive/7115352/what-the-wolf-of-wall-street-is-missing-the-women/> - An article discussing the portrayal of women and sexual harassment in the 1980s, particularly in the context of the film 'The Wolf of Wall Street.' The piece highlights the casual misogyny and sexual harassment prevalent during that era, noting that such behavior was often normalized and barely registered as offensive at the time.
4. <https://uproxx.com/filmdrunk/legal-roundup-suits-law-birthday-see/> - A legal roundup discussing various lawsuits, including one where a man depicted in 'The Wolf of Wall Street' objects to his portrayal as a whoremonger. The article highlights the character's depiction engaging in cocaine use and sexual activities, leading to the lawsuit over defamation and misrepresentation.
5. <https://belfort45.rssing.com/chan-4541066/all_p1.html> - A discussion about Jordan Belfort, the real-life figure behind 'The Wolf of Wall Street,' focusing on his lifestyle, including partying, drug use, and other excesses. The article provides insights into Belfort's behavior and the activities depicted in the film.
6. <https://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/wolf-of-wall-street-not-actually-pro-financial-fraudquaaludes-leo-and-marty-insist/> - An article addressing the debate over whether 'The Wolf of Wall Street' glorifies financial fraud and drug use. The piece includes perspectives from Leonardo DiCaprio and Martin Scorsese, who argue that the film does not promote such behaviors but rather depicts the consequences of excess.
7. <https://pipself.blogs.pace.edu/2018/07/14/sex-drugs-and-wall-street-wolf-of-wall-street-producers-caught-in-defamation-lawsuit/> - An article about a defamation lawsuit filed against the producers of 'The Wolf of Wall Street' by Andrew Greene, the former general counsel at Stratton Oakmont. Greene alleges that the film's portrayal of his character, Nicky 'Rugrat' Koskoff, as engaging in illegal activities, defamed him.