

## USING WhatsApp | 1. Introduction

WhatsApp is a messaging application which can be used to send messages to individuals or groups over the internet using your phone.

Of the apps of this kind available, it is the one UNISON recommends for its security. Messages are encrypted so they cannot be intercepted in transmission and the owner of WhatsApp, Facebook, who own WhatsApp, have testified that they do not access the content of messages for commercial purposes, unlike Facebook Messenger. However, all forms of information technology can be subject to breaches, so it should not be assumed that the app is bulletproof, and it's not to say other apps or platforms can't ever be used, e.g. Signal. But WhatsApp is the most popular app of its kind. Seek advice if you're unsure ([Y&H.Digital@unison.co.uk](mailto:Y&H.Digital@unison.co.uk)).



Another aspect to be aware of is that WhatsApp is simply a different medium for communication, and is subject to the same human risks as any interaction. Something inflammatory said in confidence during a workplace members' meeting could be reported back to a manager and be used in a witness statement supporting a complaint. In the same way, something inflammatory said in a WhatsApp discussion could become an issue outside of the group.

Of course we do not avoid holding members' meetings because of this moderate risk, and we should not be unnecessarily averse to making use of what can be an effective tool for organising if used in the right way. UNISON has also produced guidance to be signposted to our members in WhatsApp groups to help encourage appropriate use (see appendix).

## USING WhatsApp | 2. When to use WhatsApp

Here's an experience from an organiser who has made use of WhatsApp:

*WhatsApp is a good tool to use to communicate with staff, particularly those who may be hard to reach. We have used WhatsApp in a number of campaigns as an instant way to communicate with members and found it to be very effective. Most staff either have the app already on their phone or are aware of its existence and know that it is also free to use. It gives us as organisers an instant way to communicate with members (and also a unique advantage over rival unions) during campaigns. We found this particularly useful during recent WOC campaigns in health as well as on workplace issues such as proposed TUPE transfers or other issues that effect a group of staff. Members of the group can also send private messages to organisers to discuss issues and the use of this in our campaigns has been very popular. It is also a good research tool for organisers as many workplaces already will have official or 'secret' groups where staff will have a forum to discuss issues that we can be added to build knowledge or contribute to the debate.*

*Jamie Thompson, Local Organiser*

Jamie's experience of successful use of WhatsApp is backed up by research into how WhatsApp tends to be used in the UK. Unlike in some other countries where WhatsApp has, for instance, been used successfully to organise and share information widely during election campaigns, in the UK it has been found that people aren't so keen to join groups with strangers in them (source: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/11/uk-parties-struggle-to-turn-whatsapp-into-political-weapon>).

So you may well find that setting up a WhatsApp group and inviting people who have had no previous contact with one another results in low take-up. However, where you have a group of workplace colleagues who already know each other to a reasonable extent you are much more likely to find that they will participate in a group chat with their colleagues.

As Jamie says, they might already have their own group, or be happy to set one up and invite you to join if it is suggested to them. This means that in localised campaigns in particular, WhatsApp may be an effective tool to add to existing organising strategies.

## USING WhatsApp | 2. When to use WhatsApp (cont.)

WhatsApp should also be seen as a way to complement or enhance existing communication and organising strategies. For instance newsletters distributed into the workplace to update members of developments during a campaign could also be shared within a WhatsApp group, and much more quickly than by post or in person.

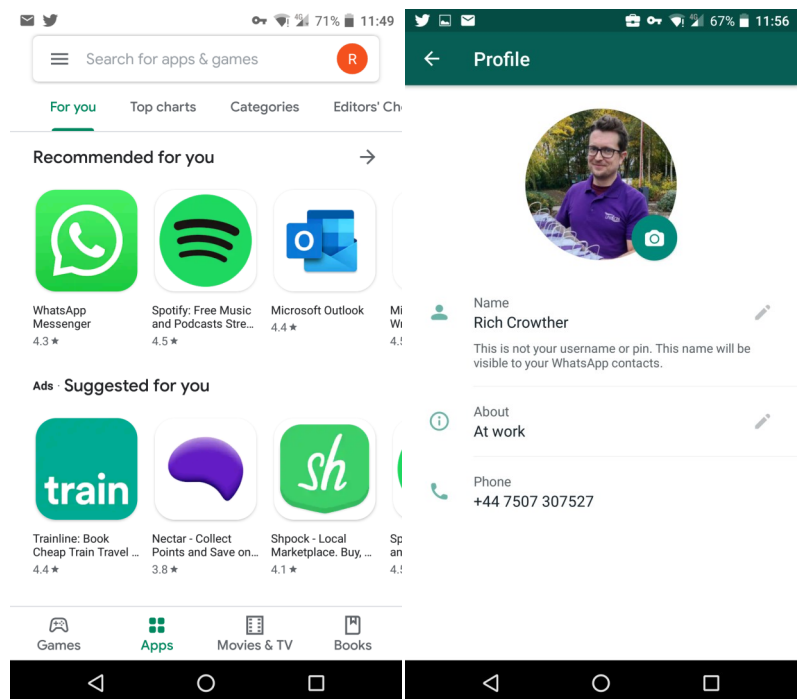
By the same token sudden developments can be quickly responded to and short bursts of important information can be sent out without the requirement to wait for paper copies to reach people. This simply enhances what we already do regularly: communicate and engage with our members. It is already possible and customary to send what are effectively instant messages via email, but it is typically the case that people do not check or open emails as frequently as they do WhatsApp messages.

It also works both ways — allowing members to quickly and conveniently make organisers aware of any developments in the workplace by posting into the group. It's this multilateral engagement which really deviates from other means of member communication (besides being able to get them all in a room at the same time!).

## USING WhatsApp | 3. Install the app on your phone

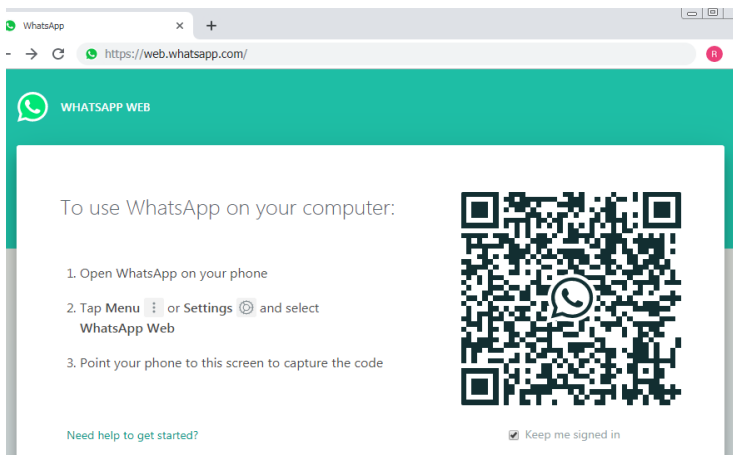


As with any smart phone app, WhatsApp can be installed from the propriety app repository. On Apple iPhones this is the App Store and on Android, this is the Google Play Store. It will normally be featured in the top charts or easily searched for. Once installed, follow the steps to verify your phone number and set up your profile including the name you wish people to see and the profile picture you wish to use — ideally a picture of yourself.



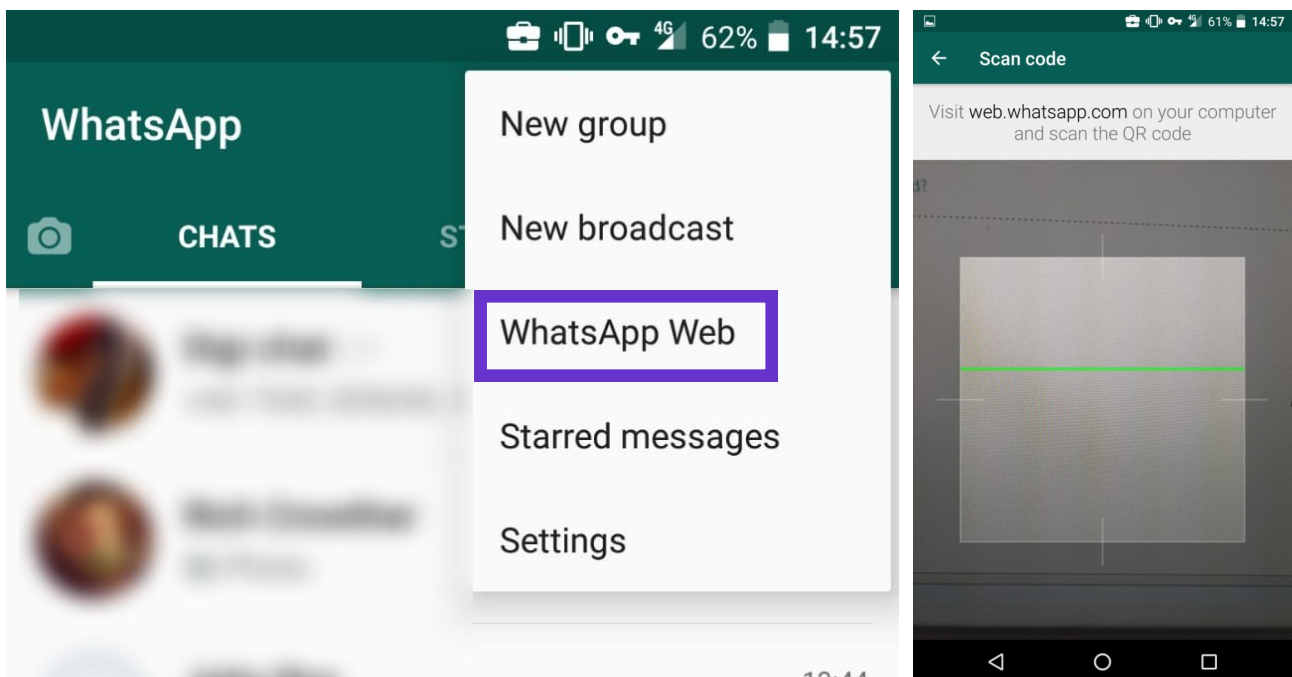
## USING WhatsApp | 3. Access it in a browser

In order to utilise WhatsApp for organising, it's helpful to access it via your desktop computer. To do this, visit [web.whatsapp.com](https://web.whatsapp.com), click 'join chat' and you should see a QR code to scan, as below.



Next, on your phone use either the **settings** button three dots in the top right corner to open the menu, and select '**Linked Devices**'. When the camera activates (it may ask you for permission to do this), point it at the QR code.

***Note:** The images are from an older version of WhatsApp and the nomenclature has since changed — and may again change in future.*

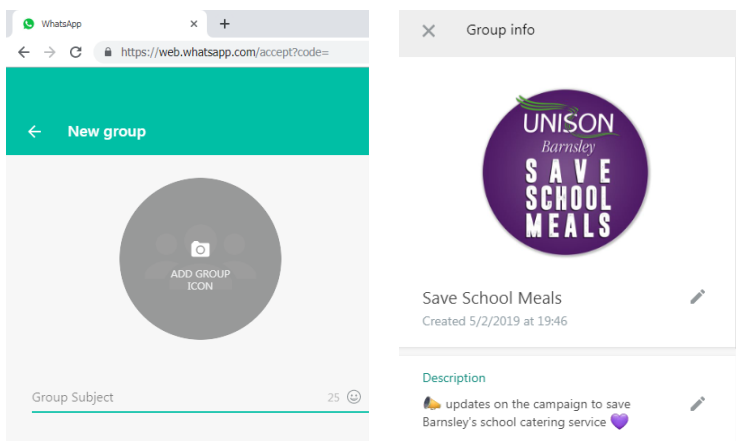


Once you've scanned the code you should be logged in to WhatsApp via your browser. This simply replicates WhatsApp functionality on your phone. It won't keep you logged in forever, and your phone needs to be turned on and connected to the web to maintain your access.

You can continue to use WhatsApp on your phone normally.

## USING WhatsApp | 4. Creating a group

To create a new group, you need to invite someone to it as a first step. This person must already be in your phone's contacts and using WhatsApp. It might be helpful to ask a colleague to let you add them (they can leave the group immediately thereafter).

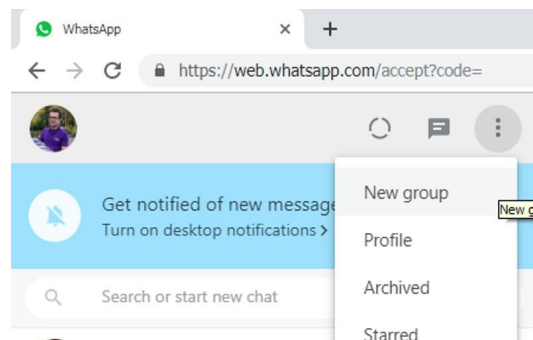


Once the group is created you can edit the **Group info** via the menu. From here you can also **remove** members of the group. Editing the **Group settings** allows you to restrict who can amend the group info and who can send messages to the group (**only admins**, or **all participants**).

At this point, the group is pretty much ready to invite members to join it. To do this you will need to generate a web link for them to click on their phones. When provided with this link, it should be explained in basic terms what they are joining and what information they will be sharing by doing so (see **Appendix 1**).

You'll see that you can copy the link, so you can share it via a WARMS email to a group of members. You can also revoke the link if for any reason you do not wish people to use the link to join the group any more.

As members join the group, post the UNISON WhatsApp group agreement (attached as **Appendix 2**) and signpost this as needed.



Next add a group description. This can be whatever best describes the purpose (e.g. 'Leeds school stewards' or 'Hull bins dispute'). You can add also a picture. Something campaign related might be apt, or a generic UNISON logo would also suffice.

