THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

**1. Introduction**

The University recognises the benefits and opportunities that social media offers for sharing information inside and outside campus, and fostering discussion and debate. However, social media also presents risks for individuals and the University (e.g. defamation, harassment, reputation). The University supports the use of social media for appropriate engagement, collaboration, and innovation, but users should be mindful of the potential consequences (including disciplinary consequences) of inappropriate use. In keeping with our values and policies, the University does not accept inappropriate use of social media, including bullying, or behaviour which is abusive or insulting. This Policy sets out the approach to behaviours when staff and students use social media.

***Social Media Definition***

Social media is defined as any online interactive tool that fosters participation, interaction, and exchange of data and information with one another. The definition extends, but is not limited to - videos, audio, blogs, discussion forums, instant messaging, and any website that allows public commenting or posting.

**2. General guidance**

Staff and students should not use social media in a way which breaches this (or any) University Policy and/or the University values. Social media should not be used in a way which does not support our University values of collaboration, compassion, inclusiveness and integrity. As a general principle, behaviour which would breach any University policy is unacceptable – whether it takes place online or in person.

**3. Scope of the Policy**

This Policy applies to all social media platforms used by staff and students. It is also applicable to officers, consultants, casual workers, agency workers, interns, and those granted access to the University’s IT network facilities during their time of working for the University, who for the purpose of this Policy are hereinafter referred collectively to as 'staff'. This Policy applies to all languages used by those outlined, including University representatives working overseas.

**4. Personal and Professional use of social media**

This Policy applies to the use of social media by staff and students:

in their personal capacity, where they or the content of the post can be linked to the University or their connection with the University; *or*

for professional purposes e.g. “in the name of the University” where staff are taken to be representing the University.

If using social media in a professional capacity, you must comply with the Digital Communications teams’ guidance. When using social media for personal use, you should state that you are speaking on your own behalf, and the views expressed are your own.

You should only use a University account for work purposes. If you disclose your affiliation to the University on your personal social media, you must state that your views do not represent those of the University. For example: *"The views expressed here are my own and are not expressed on behalf of the University of Leeds.*” However, such disclaimers do not necessarily prevent any social media communication from being in breach of this (or any) University Policy and/or the University values. Use of personal social media should be outside of working hours, or during breaks.

**5. Freedom of Expression and Academic Freedom**

Nothing in this Policy is intended to have the effect of limiting either freedom of expression or academic freedom within the law. For further details, refer to the University [Freedom of Expression Protocol.](https://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/documents/freedom_of_expression_protocol.pdf) However, when staff and students use social media they are expected to adhere to the standards set out in this Policy, and to the University's values and policies.

When considering complaints, grievances or disciplinary action in relation to a breach of the Policy, the University shall consider whether the conduct in question is within the scope of the person’s freedom of expression within the law and/or academic freedom within the law.

**6. Expected Behaviours on Social Media**

There is an expectation that anybody using social media must adhere to the standards of behaviour set out in this Policy (and other University policies) and which align with the University values.

***Accountability***

You areaccountable for your communications and actions on social media and must comply with this Policy. This includes communication you have shared directly, or communication which is shared by others with you where your response falls within the scope of this Policy.

***Professionalism***

Social media should be used by staff in way which is professional and in accordance with University values and Policies, including the Code of Conduct - Professional Behaviours and Relationships, and the Policy on Dignity and Mutual Respect.

Staff/students should not:

* post or share content (including photos, images, videos or soundtracks) which is unlawful, abusive, insulting, threatening, or which may reasonably be considered likely to cause serious distress or cause another person to fear for their safety, or which defames or unfairly disparages the University, staff/students or any third party on social media sites;
* harass, bully or unlawfully discriminate against staff/students or third parties;
* knowingly make false or misleading statements; and/or
* impersonate colleagues or students;
* post details about ongoing investigations or proceedings under staff or student procedures;
* post or share content which would breach the Use of Computer Systems Policy: <https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0011153>

There may be occasions where individuals in posts connected with University work (e.g. official research or other professional activity) are expected and required to make posts or comments in a professional capacity which could be perceived or deemed to be critical of the work of the others, but such posts or comments should only be made, and expressed in a proportionate, reasonable and respectful manner.

***Other Policy Compliance***

Use of social media must align with all University policies including [academic freedom](https://ris.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Policy_Statement_on_Academic_Freedom_and_Research.docx), [data protection](https://dataprotection.leeds.ac.uk/data-protection-code-of-practice/), [dignity and mutual respect](https://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/documents/dignity_and_mutual_respect.pdf), [information protection](https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0011140), [intellectual property](https://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/documents/ipr_policy.pdf), and [use of computer systems policy](https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0011153). If you are a member of a professional or regulated body, you may need to follow their guidelines or policies. You must also comply with the terms of use of the relevant social media platform.

***Awareness***

Staff and students must be mindful that their social media comments, digital endorsements (for example a ‘like’), or the comments of people with whom they are connected, may be misinterpreted and that all communications may not be private. Even if you are posting in what appears to be a ‘private’ group, or you have locked down your privacy settings on your accounts, do apply the same standards as if you were posting publicly.

**7. Intellectual Property (IP)**

Social media content (whether work related or personal) must not contain information that is confidential, or which has the potential to jeopardise the University's interests, or which breaches the rights of others, in relation to IP. Examples of potentially unacceptable content include the disclosure of confidential information, and use of other’s work, where permission has not been granted. Before using the work of others, staff and students must ensure any necessary permissions have been obtained alongside the granting of any necessary acknowledgments. Before uploading material to a social media account or website, anyone responsible for uploading material must review the terms and conditions of the platform. Posting content may result in giving up ownership rights and control.

**8. Brand Management**

The University's trademark and logo are the property of the University, and advance approval for their use must be obtained in writing from the Communications and Engagement team. To preserve the integrity of the University's brand, reputation, and image, all accounts purporting to represent any aspect of the University must comply with [guidelines set out by the Communications and Engagement team.](https://comms.leeds.ac.uk/our-visual-identity)

**9. Responsibilities**

All staff and students are responsible for:

(a) Familiarising themselves and adhering to this and other relevant policies when using social media.

(b) Obtaining approval from the University's Digital Communications team before creating an account that represents the University, e.g. a School or research group account with University branding.

(c) Monitoring, updating, and managing the content they have posted.

(d) Securing and managing passwords for institutional accounts, including transferring access to relevant staff as necessary.

(e) Reporting and escalating any issues and concerns as needed.

(f) Adding an appropriate disclaimer to personal accounts when the University is named or recognisable (refer to section 4).

(g) Reporting any incidents or concerns in accordance with section 11.

(h) Ensuring that only University issued accounts are used for University activities. Personal accounts must not be used to represent the University or manage University services.

(i) Giving consideration to digital accessibility guidance and standards when using social media (see <https://digitalaccessibility.leeds.ac.uk/>).

(j) Complying with the General Data Protection Regulations, Data Protection Act 2018, and the University's Data Protection Policy when using social media.

**10. Social Media Monitoring**

The University does not monitor social media accounts, however it reserves the right to review social media activity for legitimate purposes such as investigating illegal or inappropriate online behaviour or to comply with legal obligations. See relevant policy: <https://it.leeds.ac.uk/it?id=kb_article&sysparm_article=KB0011153>

The University may conduct further investigations if it becomes aware of alleged seriously inappropriate online behaviour (including anonymously posted behaviour) or potential breaches of this Policy or any other University policy or regulation. Evidence from social media comments, videos, photographs, or other online material may be used in the investigatory process and, if necessary, formal action in line with existing policies including [support staff procedure agreement](https://hr.leeds.ac.uk/info/26/conduct_capability_and_grievance/236/support_staff_procedure_agreement), [disciplinary procedure](https://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/disciplinary_procedure.html), [conduct capability and grievance procedures](https://hr.leeds.ac.uk/info/53/managing_individual_performance/328/conduct_capability_and_grievance_procedures), [general university disciplinary regulations.](https://www.leeds.ac.uk/secretariat/documents/gudr_current.pdf)

**11. Incidents and Response**

Any individual, including students, staff, or members of the public, may bring to the attention of the University social media content posted which is felt may be problematic. The University will determine the most appropriate and reasonable course of action, which may include dismissing the complaint as the post was in line with the Policy, referring it to senior University managers for review, and/or another procedure. If you want to report anonymously you can do so via [Report + Support](https://reportandsupport.leeds.ac.uk/report).

**12. Consequences of a Policy Breach**

Any potential breach of the Social Media Policy will be investigated, in line with the relevant investigation procedure. Breaching this Policy may result in formal action being taken in line with the Support Staff Agreement and/or Statute XXI – Conduct. More serious breaches may result in action up to and including dismissal on the grounds of gross or serious misconduct for staff, and withdrawal or termination of registration for students or the ending of a contract or placement with the University. Formal action can be considered regardless of the time or place of the breach.

The University reserves the right to request the removal of content from University social media accounts if they pose a risk to the University's reputation or the safety of the community or are otherwise in breach of this Policy. Failure to comply with such requests may result in disciplinary action. If the conduct is potentially illegal, the University may report the matter to police. The individual may face legal action from the University, staff, students, or third parties.

**13. Additional Information**

For clarity, this Policy does not form part of any contract of employment or other contract to provide services, and will be reviewed and amended in light of experience of its application and developments in social media technologies.

**Approved by University Council, July 2023**