

Social Media Policy for Colleges, Schools, Institutes and Units



Policy owner:
External
Communication
Unit

Approval date and body
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1. Purpose

As powerful channels of two-way communication, social media provides the university with unique opportunities and benefits in terms of reaching its audiences to build awareness of its activities, and to encourage its audiences to actively engage with and support the university to achieve its mission.

The use of social media as part of the operations of the university also poses potential risks to the reputation of the organisation and its employees.

The decentralised nature of social media channel management across the university means that individual colleges, schools, institutes and units set up and manage their own social media channels and directly publish content to their channels at a local level.

This requires the university to have a policy in place which sets out the standards for the management of such official institutional social media accounts.

This social media policy has been developed to ensure the appropriate use of official institutional social media accounts as part of the operations of the university.

2. Scope

The scope of this policy is limited to employees who manage and publish to official institutional social media accounts of colleges, schools, institutes and units of the university.

This policy does not in any way intend to impact on academic freedom which is protected under Section 14 of the University's Act 1997 as follows:

“A member of the academic staff of a university shall have the freedom, within the law, in his or her teaching, research and any other activities either in or outside the university, to question and test received wisdom, to put forward new ideas and to state controversial or unpopular opinions and shall not be disadvantaged, or subject to less favourable treatment by the university, for the exercise of that freedom.”

3. Definitions

An official institutional social media account is an account operated by a college, school, institute or unit of the university to engage with their audiences online in support of their communication goals.

4. Principles

Colleges, schools, institutes and units that wish to set up an official social media account(s) must seek the approval of the Principal/Head/Director of their college, school, institute or unit.

All official institutional social media accounts must have an appointed employee who is identified by the Principal/Head/Director as being responsible for managing and publishing to the account.

All content published to the official social media accounts of colleges, schools, institutes and units must adhere to the laws in force at the time.

With this in mind, the appointed employee responsible for the content published to the account(s) should be familiar with the following legislative acts:

- Child Trafficking and Pornography Acts
- Copyright and Related Rights Acts
- Data Protection Acts
- Defamation Act
- Employment Equality Acts
- Equal Status Act
- Incitement to Hatred Act
- Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act

All content published to the official institutional social media accounts of colleges, schools, institutes and units must also be in keeping with the existing university codes and standards of behaviour for employees. These standards and codes define what is regarded as acceptable behaviour and what is considered unacceptable behaviour.

These university standards and codes of behaviour are set out in the following university policies:

- Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy
- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Code of Responsible Conduct of Research
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Dignity and Respect Policy
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy
- Hospitality and Entertainment Policy
- Information Technology Services Acceptable Use Policy
- Protected Disclosures Policy
- Sexual Misconduct Policy

5. Provision for Pre-existing Social Media Accounts

All pre-existing institutional social media accounts require retrospective approval in line with the terms and conditions set out in this policy.

6. Roles and responsibilities

Adherence to Laws and University Standards and Codes of Behaviour

Employees responsible for managing and publishing content to institutional social media accounts must familiarise themselves with the policies listed above.

It is the responsibility of the college, school, institute and unit, and the employee identified to set up and manage an official institutional social media account, to ensure that all material published to the account adheres to the laws in force at the time and are in keeping with the university standards and codes of behaviour.

Social Media Account Management

The social media account(s) of colleges, schools, institutes and units are managed locally and the responsibility to ensure that the standards and codes of behaviour surrounding the use of social media and online platforms also resides within the local unit.

It is the responsibility of the college, school, institute or unit to ensure that employees with access to publish on these social media accounts adhere to this policy.

Social media accounts without the required formal approval may, when necessary, be reported by the University to the social media platform for removal from the internet without any prior notice to the local account manager.

The College Principal, Head of School or Director/Head of Unit must assign a single qualified employee to manage access to the social media account(s) for their college, school, institute or unit.

This assigned individual must provide the college, school, institute or unit Principal/Head/Director with the current login details for the social media account(s), and they must also be available to provide access to the social media account(s) on request from the University if any published content is considered to be in breach of this policy or other university policies.

Responsibilities of Social Media Account Managers

Employees assigned responsibility for college, school, institute or unit social media accounts must work to ensure that any content posted adheres to the laws in force at the time, is in keeping with university standards and codes of behaviour, and is:

- of good nature and of the highest integrity
- respectful of others and of differing views and opinions
- in support of the core activities and mission of the college, school, institute or unit
- free from any form of offence or harassment towards any individual or organisation
- not defamatory or slanderous towards any individual or organisation
- not in breach of copyright, intellectual property rights and/or general data protection regulations
- not seeking to impersonate any individual or organisation
- in compliance with the university's data protection, privacy and confidentiality policies
- in compliance with with the university brand guidelines
- not in support of any commercial product or soliciting business for an individual or organisation except those which may be officially approved by the university at a given time

They must also:

- ensure any posted materials that are reported to be in breach of this policy are removed and a report on how the breach occurred prepared and sent to the college, school, institute or unit manager

- sufficiently protect access to the social media account from those whose duties are not directly associated with the account
- on leaving employment at the university, transfer access to the social media account to another employee of the college, school, institute or unit who has been officially assigned to manage the account

Support and Training for Social Media Account Managers

Employees assigned responsibility for college, school, institute or unit social media accounts are encouraged to source the online resources available from each platform on how to best manage and secure access to a social media account(s).

Annual training is provided to social media account managers of approved college, school, institute and unit accounts. This specialist training is managed as part of the portfolio of the university's external communication unit.

Additional awareness training and obligations under the associated university policy areas and laws including: Dignity and Respect, General Data Protection Regulation, Copyright and Related Rights Acts etc. is available through related university staff training programmes.

Representing the Views and Opinions of the University

Content posted on the social media channels of colleges, schools, institutes and units set up and managed at a local level does not represent the views and opinions of the University.

Notice, Report and Remove Procedure

The University encourages all social media users to be vigilant and report any concerns they may have about breaches or potential breaches of this social media policy.

Minor infractions on college, school, institute or unit social media channels should be reported directly to the college, school, institute or unit responsible for approving and managing the account.

Where a minor infraction is reported, the individual assigned to manage the approved social media account will be required to review the reported material, remove the material should it be in breach of the policy, and prepare a short report on the breach and how it occurred for the college, school, institute or unit manager.

Significant breaches of this policy will require a response beyond the college, school, institute or unit manager. These more significant breaches should be directly escalated to the university's central external communication unit.

This unit will review the reported material (alleged breach), have any material in breach of the policy recorded and removed. It will prepare a brief report on the breach describing how it occurred, the parties responsible and offer recommendations for the improved management of the institutional social media account where the breach occurred.

Where appropriate, the central external communication unit may also report the breach directly to the appropriate social media company.

Where a reported breach is deemed potentially illegal, the central external communication unit will report the breach and the offending content to the appropriate legal authorities.

The University reserves the right to have any content deemed in breach of this policy removed from a college, school, institute and unit social media channel in advance of any report or investigation into how the breach occurred.

The University reserves the right to take appropriate action under its existing disciplinary procedures against any employee whose breach of this policy has been substantiated.

The University also reserves the right to report social media accounts associated with the university that have been inactive for some time directly to the appropriate social media company to request that they be closed down.

Response Procedure

When unacceptable conduct and interactions in breach of this policy occur on approved institutional social media accounts, the following response procedure (in part or in full) will be taken:

- pause on all postings to the social media account
- pause on all local access to the social media account
- mandatory training for the employee appointed as responsible for the management of the social media account
- reassignment of access and publishing rights to the social media account
- notice of closure of the social media account issued to the college, school, institute or unit where approval for the social media account was granted
- notice issued to the employee appointed as responsible for the management of the social media account to advise them that (following

the outcome of an investigation into the reported alleged breach of the social media policy) they may face possible disciplinary action under the Staff Code of Conduct and/or other university codes of behaviour and policies that may apply

- other responses that may apply in accordance with existing laws and legislation

7. Related documents

8. Version history

This is the first version of the document.

It was last updated: 17 April 2025

This policy document will be reviewed and updated as appropriate, on an annual basis, to reflect any changes in the associated university policies, standards, codes of behaviour, and laws.