



Document Name	Social Media Code of Practice
Subject	Expectations concerning the use of social media by staff and students at the University of Nottingham
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Responsible Team	Representatives from RAA, External Relations, HR, Student and Campus Life, Governance and Assurance and the Students' Union
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1) Purpose

The purpose of this Code of Practice is to establish guidelines and expectations for the responsible and ethical use of social media by staff and students at the University of Nottingham UK (UoN) and to help them protect their online privacy and security.

Through requiring adherence to this Code, the University seeks to strike a balance between the advantages of social media engagement and the potential risks, enabling online activities to align with its values and contribute to a cohesive and constructive online community.

2) Scope

- This Code applies to all staff and students at the University of Nottingham UK (UoN) and to staff and students from the University of Nottingham Ningbo, China, and the University of Nottingham, Malaysia, who are working or studying at or visiting the UoN.
- This Code applies to social media communications made at any time, whether privately or publicly, and from anywhere, including away from campus and on personal devices, whether to an individual, to a limited group or public, which have relevance to or impact upon the UoN or members of its community. It also applies to reposting, sharing or reacting to content written by other people.

3) Definitions

The term “staff” means, for the purposes of this policy, University employees and individuals engaged as workers by the University.

The term “student” encompasses all students from the point at which their place at the UoN is confirmed, including those studying with the University of Nottingham Online. It includes students at all levels of study (e.g. undergraduate, postgraduate, or on apprenticeship programmes), whether they are studying full-time, part-time or as a distance learner and if they are registered as a UoN student but studying elsewhere (e.g. Lincoln Medical School). It encompasses students who have interrupted their studies, or who have been temporarily suspended, or excluded, or have their thesis pending or are in some other way still members of the UoN community. It also covers Students’ Union (SU) Sabbatical Officers during their period of office.

For the purposes of this Code, “social media” is defined as any online interactive tool which encourages participation, interaction and exchanges whether in writing, by video or through other means. This includes internal systems (MS Teams, SharePoint, Viva Engage); external sites such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, WeChat, X (formerly known as Twitter), Discord, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat etc and also applies to blogs, discussion forums, instant messaging and any web site that allows public commenting or posting. These are not exhaustive examples and as social media and other electronic interactions evolve over time, the principles of this Code will continue to be applicable.

“Personal Data”: refers to any information relating to an identified or identifiable living individual, such as, but not limited to, names.

“Confidential Information”: means any non-public information which is sensitive, proprietary or otherwise confidential in nature included, but not limited to, unpublished research data, financial information, strategy and business information, and intellectual property.

4) Key principles and requirements

Our values of inclusivity, ambition, openness, fairness and respect underpin the activities of our staff and students and extend to use of social media.

Social media as a communication channel can bring benefits and opportunities such as sharing news, information and successes, keeping staff and students up to date with important developments and promoting healthy academic debate. Wherever and however users do this, they must be aware of the potential impact on themselves, others and UoN. Reputational damage to UoN can have far-reaching consequences, including the ability to recruit students and staff.

Staff and students can contact the Media Team for advice and guidance on the use of social media by emailing pressoffice@nottingham.ac.uk.

In **any context**, staff and students should carefully consider any content before posting or commenting and:

- Abide by the principles and requirements of this Code and related policies
- Adhere to applicable laws and regulations, including, but not limited to those relating to data protection, equality and copyright
- Ensure protection of personal data and confidential information
- Ensure that any activity aligns with internal and external free speech and academic freedom requirements, including the UoN [Statement on Free Speech](#) and Free Speech Code of Practice
- Have regard to the dignity and privacy of students, staff and others and foster an inclusive online environment
- Make sure that they have appropriate privacy settings and password security on any social media accounts to ensure that they are protecting their own privacy and restricting access to anything that they might post
- Ensure any content is factually accurate

Social media in the context of Free Speech and Academic Freedom

The UoN is committed to protecting free speech within the law and academic freedom so that we can achieve our mission of advancing truth, knowledge and understanding and students and staff can become acquainted with new information, ideas and diverse viewpoints. The UoN provides an inclusive and supportive environment that encourages civil and peaceful debate, one in which students and staff can challenge their own and others' beliefs and opinions and scrutinise these on their merits.

This commitment reflects the UoN's core values of inclusivity, ambition, openness, fairness, and respect and it is consistent with the principles enshrined in [Statute 9](#), whereby "*Academic staff shall have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves at risk of losing their jobs or privileges at the University or the likelihood of their securing promotion or different jobs at the University being reduced.*"

As set out in the [Free Speech and Academic Freedom statement](#), it must be recognised that a commitment to promote freedom of speech and academic freedom does not require tolerance of abuse, threats, incitement to violence, hatred, discrimination, or other unlawful acts. The Equality Act 2010 protects people from direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the basis of protected characteristics. All staff and students should familiarise themselves with UoN's Free Speech and Academic Freedom statement and its Free Speech Code of Practice to ensure that they understand our commitment to promoting free speech within the law and their role and responsibilities in supporting this. All use of social media should be consistent with the expectations of the Statement, the Free Speech Code of Practice and this Code.

5) Staff - use of social media in relation to professional activities

There are specific [social media guidelines for managing official UoN accounts](#).

Examples of use of social media in relation to professional activities include, but are not limited to, Teams groups, posts relating to professional activity where UoN is explicitly referenced or affiliation is clear and communications platforms for a professionally-related forum e.g. JISC.

When posting in relation to their work, staff have responsibility for:

Identifying affiliation

- Making it clear that views are their own and not necessarily representative of the UoN when using a personal account for professional use, unless explicitly authorised to do so. It is recommended that staff add the following suggested wording to their personal social media profiles: *“The views expressed here are my own and do not reflect those of the University of Nottingham.”*
Even if accounts use wording of this nature, staff are still expected to abide by the requirements of this Code.

Confidentiality, non-disclosure and permissions

- Ensuring they do not disclose confidential information, proprietary data, or any non-public information
- Ensuring they do not share personal data relating to other staff and/or students and/or a third party without their knowledge and explicit consent
- Ensuring that they have permission to share any third-party materials, including images, photographs, text and videos, before uploading them to or linking to them via social media and, where sharing is permitted, ensuring that such materials or shared links are credited appropriately
- Checking the terms and conditions of a social media account and/or website before uploading material to it; by posting material to social media accounts and/or websites, a staff member may be releasing ownership rights and control of the content to the host platform.

Seeking/providing advice and guidance

- Seeking guidance from appropriate channels such as a line manager or External Relations if uncertain about the appropriateness of a particular post or interaction
- Contacting External Relations for advice in the event of contact from press or media regarding content they have posted prior to responding (pressoffice@nottingham.ac.uk)
- Making staff for whom they have line management responsibilities aware of this Code as part of their induction
- Making third parties they have engaged e.g. contractors and volunteers aware of this Code upon engagement

Professional engagement, tone and language

- Maintaining a professional tone and language in all interactions
- Complying with any additional requirements for use of social media in terms of their fitness to practise if they are subject to regulation by a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB), for example, Medicine, Nursing, Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy

Quality and accuracy

- Ensuring content is factually accurate
- Avoiding the spreading of factually inaccurate information or engaging in activities that could harm the credibility of the UoN or its community
- Regularly monitoring, updating and managing content they have posted
- Correcting mistakes promptly and transparently

Conflict of interest

- When posting, being clear about any potential conflicts of interest that may impact their objectivity or the perception of their integrity

Social media usage during work hours

- Ensuring that use of social media during work hours does not interfere with work performance

6) Students - use of social media in relation to study

There are specific [social media guidelines for managing official UoN accounts](#). Examples of use of social media in relation to study include, but are not limited to, Teams module groups, Facebook groups related to academic activities, WhatsApp group chats for project work.

When posting in relation to their study, students have responsibility for:

Identifying affiliation

- Making it clear that views are their own and not necessarily representative of the UoN when using a personal account for study purposes, unless explicitly authorised to do so. It is recommended that students add the following suggested wording to their personal social media profiles: *“The views expressed here are my own and do not reflect those of the University of Nottingham.”* Even if accounts use wording of this nature, students are still expected to abide by the requirements of this Code.

Confidentiality, non-disclosure and permissions

- Ensuring they do not disclose confidential information, proprietary data, or any non-public information
- Ensuring they do not share personal data relating to other staff and/or students and/or a third party without their knowledge and explicit consent
- Ensuring that they have permission to share any third-party materials, including images, photographs, text and videos, before uploading them to or linking to them via social media and, where sharing is permitted, ensuring that such materials or shared links are credited appropriately
- Checking the terms and conditions of a social media account and/or website before uploading material to it; by posting material to social media accounts and/or websites, a staff member may be releasing ownership rights and control of the content to the host platform.
- Ensuring posts do not breach academic misconduct regulations

Engagement, tone and language

- Seeking guidance from appropriate channels such as a personal tutor or External Relations (pressoffice@nottingham.ac.uk) if uncertain about the appropriateness of a particular post or interaction
- Maintaining compliance with the UoN’s Student Code of Conduct (Non-Academic)

Quality and accuracy

- Ensuring content is factually accurate
- Avoiding the spreading of factually inaccurate information or engaging in activities that could harm the credibility of the UoN or its people
- Regularly monitoring, updating and managing content they have posted
- Correcting mistakes promptly and transparently

Conflict of interest

- When posting, being clear about any potential conflicts of interest that may impact their objectivity or the perception of their integrity

Students on programmes which are accredited by a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB), for example, Medicine, Nursing, Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacy need to make sure they comply with any additional programme-specific requirements for use of social media.

Personal use of social media

Where a private social media account is used by members of staff or students and the content could impact the UoN or the people associated with the UoN, this Code applies, even if the person posting does not make express reference to their affiliation with the UoN in the post.

Examples of personal use of social media include but are not limited to: telling people about taking on or leaving a role at the UoN, campus photography on Instagram, halls of residence/house WhatsApp/Snapchat groups, Discord forums for organising non-academic events, WhatsApp groups for staff social events.

When posting personally, staff and students should:

- Not use the UoN logo or images in accounts that are not official UoN accounts; if unauthorised use of the logo is detected, External Relations will ask for it to be removed. Please see [university brand pages](#) for information on use of the logo.
- Consider maintaining separate accounts for personal and professional/study use; this can help manage online image and maintain a level of privacy
- Be cautious about sharing personal data about others without their consent even when not explicitly affiliated with UoN
- Not post content considered to be [Unacceptable Use](#) as detailed in this Code

Additionally, staff and students are advised to:

- Check the privacy settings of social media accounts and not assume the default settings are good enough to protect their own privacy
- Not accept friend requests from people they do not know
- Be careful about the personal data they share, especially data such as their date of birth, home address, financial information or names of close relatives
- Make sure they have strong and different passwords for each account
- Use two-factor authentication, where available, and allow the site to use additional verification, such as sending a code via a text message for access
- Pause and consider the potential consequences of posts before sharing; once something is online, it can be challenging to remove completely
- Approach making an online comment in the same way as making a comment in a meeting or other public forum; they should not post anything they would not be willing and/or legally permitted to say in person to another individual
- Always consider the audience – and the potential audience; anything posted can be forwarded on to other recipients
- Be mindful of how posts may be perceived by different audiences
- Before sharing news, articles, or information, verify its accuracy to avoid spreading misinformation
- Establish personal boundaries for social media use, including time spent online; take care that personal online activities do not interfere with well-being, relationships, work and study
- Stay informed about changes in social media platforms, privacy policies, and online security

7) Unacceptable use

The following non-exhaustive summary lists social media activity that could be considered unacceptable in nature by UoN.

- Posting anonymously or creating a fake account in order to post content which would breach the requirements of this Code.
- Using another person's name or account without their consent to post content.

Posting, publishing or commenting in support of material which:

- Breaches UoN policies/codes of conduct or the requirements of regulatory bodies
- Is threatening, harassing, discriminatory, illegal, or defamatory towards any individual or entity
- Amounts to stalking, which is persistent and unwanted attention that makes the recipient feel harassed
- Amounts to cyber-bullying
- Deliberately mocks an individual with the intent to harass or humiliate them
- Amounts to information which breaches an individual's contractual duties to the UoN
- Is confidential information relating to UoN, including its staff, students and officers, associated entities and subsidiary companies
- Includes personal information about another individual, including contact information, without their explicit consent to do so
- Promotes a commercial product or service on behalf of the UoN, which is not covered within the [External Work policy](#) or in line with UoN Values
- Constitutes or may amount to a criminal offence

In order to try to ensure prompt resolution of concerns, staff and students are encouraged to raise any dissatisfaction in relation to their employment or study through relevant UoN procedures e.g. through a line manager, personal tutor or complaint procedure, rather than posting about them on social media.

8) Reporting unacceptable use

Unacceptable use of social media by a member of the UoN community

Staff - where a staff member is in receipt of any content where it is considered that another member of staff or a student is in breach of this Code, in the first instance they should discuss their concern with their line manager. Line managers should contact the HR Department for advice where required. If the concerns are about the actions or inactions of the immediate line manager, the employee could discuss this with the next level of manager (continuing through the line management chain as necessary). If a staff member is unclear who their line manager is, or is unable to raise concerns locally, they may [contact the HR Department](#). Staff may also use [Report and Support](#) (see below).

Institutional malpractice can be notified using the [Whistleblowing Code](#).

Students - where a student is in receipt of any content where it is considered that a member of staff or another student is in breach of this Code, this should be reported via their school, for example to a personal or senior tutor, or through [Report and Support](#) (see below).

Applicants for study at the UoN should report concerns to [Admissions](#).

Where reputational damage to the UoN is suspected, the matter may also be escalated by the person to whom it is reported to an appropriate senior manager and/or to External Relations to assess any damage and take any corrective actions.

Dealing with abuse, threats and unlawful acts from outside the UoN community

In all cases, unacceptable use of social media may be reported promptly and directly to the relevant social media platform e.g. Instagram, Facebook.

In an emergency situation, where a staff member or student's physical or personal safety is at a risk whilst on campus, the Security team must be immediately notified and they will liaise with the police, as required:

Phone: 0115 951 3557 (extension 13557 internally) for security reception

Phone: 0115 951 3013 (extension 13013 internally) for 24 hour security control

Phone: 0115 951 8888 (extension 18888 internally) for emergencies only

If staff or student are away from campus, then they should contact their local police station.

Report and support

[Report and Support](#) is a publicly available platform where UoN students, staff and anyone with a concern about a UoN student or staff member can make a report if they have experienced or witnessed incidents of bullying, harassment, hate or sexual misconduct..

Support is also available for members of the UoN community from:

- The [Staff wellbeing portal](#)
- [Student wellbeing support](#)

9) Consequences of unacceptable use

Following a report of unacceptable use as outlined in section 8, actions may include asking for posts to be removed or referring the matter to be dealt with under a different procedure such as the [Disciplinary Procedure for Staff](#) or the [Student Code of Conduct \(Non-Academic\)](#). There may be circumstances in which more than one of these procedures is applicable e.g. students also holding staff status, Sabbatical Officers also holding student status and when this occurs, a prompt decision will be made about the appropriate process for the circumstances.

Failure to comply with removal/retraction requests could, in itself, result in disciplinary action.

Any breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action (see links above) up to and including dismissal (staff) or exclusion/termination of registration (students). Disciplinary action may be taken regardless of whether the breach is committed in the course of employment or study and regardless of whether any UoN equipment or facilities are used in committing the breach.

Conduct which is also potentially a criminal offence, such as harassment may also be reported to the police.

Misuse of social media and electronic communications can also expose staff and students to risk of civil legal action, for example defamation proceedings brought by third parties.

Student and Staff Applicants

The UoN does not routinely screen personal social media accounts as part of its recruitment and selection processes for students or staff. However, the UoN reserves the right to rescind an offer of admission or employment if it receives a report of social media activity by an applicant (student or staff) that constitutes a serious breach of this Code of Practice. This may include content that is threatening, harassing, discriminatory, illegal or defamatory.

In line with the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, the University remains committed to upholding lawful freedom of speech and academic freedom. Accordingly, any such reports will be carefully assessed to distinguish between unacceptable conduct and lawful expressions of opinion, particularly where academic freedom or freedom of expression may be engaged.

10) Related policies, procedures and governance

The principles and expectations of this Code should be read and understood in the context of wider policies and procedures applicable to its use. These policies and procedures can be found in the [University of Nottingham Policy Finder](#) and include:

- Free Speech and Academic Freedom Statement
- Free Speech Code of Practice
- Data Protection Policy
- Information Security Policy
- Acceptable Use Policy
- Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics
- Dignity Policy
- Employee Monitoring Policy
- Copyright Policy
- Intellectual Property Policy