

Context

The following amended policy sets out the updated position in relation to the use by staff of social media; the amendments take account of the technological and legal changes since the policy was introduced in 2015. The Policy applies to anyone who is employed by the University; anyone engaged under a contract for services with the University on a self-employed or contractor basis, or who represents the University in an official capacity. All of these groups will be expected to adhere to the same standards when using social media when that usage has an impact on the University or their role within the University.

The aim of this policy is to effectively balance the benefits and risks of social media use within the University as a workplace and to address the scope of the right to free speech and how it interacts with other, potentially competing, employee rights and obligations. The University's Statement on [Free Speech](#) outlines the University's position on free speech and the key considerations to be taken into account when issues arise. The University's approach to free speech is informed by the respective legal obligations, including those relating to Academic Freedom as a distinct category of free speech, and by the views of the University community who were consulted on the terms of the free speech statement.

While social media can offer many social, academic and professional benefits, there is an inherent risk attached to its use, and this policy addresses the impact that social media can have on individual members of staff, their fellow staff members, students, local community and the University's reputation. It advocates the use of social media, but encourages a considered approach, while outlining the standards of conduct expected from employees at the University.

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Social Media Policy for Staff

1. Policy statement

The University of Nottingham ("University") recognises and embraces the benefits and opportunities that social media can bring as a communication channel. It can be used to share news, information and successes, keep staff and students up to date with important developments and promote healthy academic debate about controversial subjects and areas of research. There is, however, an inherent risk involved in using instantaneous and far-reaching forms of communication and inappropriate use can impact upon staff, students, local community and the reputation of the University. The University encourages you to engage, collaborate and innovate through social media; however, wherever and however you do this, you must be aware of the potential impact on yourself, others and the University.

2. Scope

For the purpose of this policy, 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 (Teams, Yammer); external sites such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Twitter, TikTok etc. and also applies to blogs, discussion forums, instant messaging and any website 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 guidance will continue to be applicable.

This policy applies to anyone who is employed by the University; anyone engaged under a contract for services with the University on a self-employed or contractor basis, or who represents the University in an official capacity and any subsequent references to 'staff' within the policy this should be read as applying to all groups covered by the policy. It also covers any professional or personal communications within a social media platform which directly or indirectly reference or associate with the University. There is a complementary [social media policy](#) that applies to students.

The scope of this policy encompasses all social media communications which impact the University or the role of the staff member within the University, whether sent on work devices during working hours or on personal devices outside of office hours.

In cases where a private social media account is used by members of staff, whether concerning work-related or personal matters, which impacts the University or the people associated with the University, this policy must be adhered to. The aim of the policy is to protect staff from the negative aspects of social media use, such as abuse or trolling, and is in no way intended to intrude on private lives or general social media presence.

3. Approach

Nothing in this policy is intended to have the effect of limiting either freedom of speech or academic freedom, subject to that freedom being exercised within the law and the terms and spirit of the University's statement on [free speech](#), the [University's values](#) and [Dignity Policy](#) being respected.

The policy terms are aligned to the current legal position and are designed to enable staff to make informed choices when posting to social media.

Staff are responsible for what they communicate in any social media and the standards of conduct set out in the University's policies listed below are applicable to social media use:

- [Free Speech and Academic Freedom](#) -This covers the University of Nottingham's stance on free speech for both staff and students.
- [Data Protection Policy](#) – This policy sets out the standards which safeguard the data protection rights and obligations of the University, its staff and third parties.
- [Acceptable Use Policy](#) – This code of practice details rules for use of the University Computing facilities, how the university monitor use and what happens when the facilities are mis-used.
- [Electronic Mail Usage Policy](#) - To be read in conjunction with the Code of Practice for users of the University Computing Facilities, this policy contains good practice guidelines when sending emails from and to University accounts or emailing in connection with your work.
- [Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics](#) – The University requires all staff and students engaged in research to maintain the highest standards of ethics and integrity in the conduct of research. This Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics provides a framework for the governance of all research conducted under the auspices of the University of Nottingham and requires that all researchers adhere to the highest standards of ethical conduct, and to all applicable statutes and Government guidelines in carrying out their research
- [Information Security Policy](#) - This policy sets out the University's overall approach to Information Security and its sub-policies including monitoring provide detailed approaches for specific areas.
- [Dignity at Nottingham Policy](#) – The purpose of this policy is to assist in establishing an environment in which harassment, bullying and victimisation are regarded as unacceptable across the University. This policy outlines procedures to be followed if anyone at the University feels they are being harassed, bullied or victimised.
- [Disciplinary Procedure for Staff](#) - All University staff are expected to meet acceptable standards of work performance and conduct throughout their employment and the disciplinary procedures form part of the contract of employment.
- [University of Nottingham social media guidelines](#) - Setting up new or managing existing social media channels. Guidance on how to manage and set up sites that are intended to promote the work of the University of Nottingham, or its associated partners.

4. Using social media as a teaching and learning tool

Where staff intend to use social media as a teaching and learning tool, this should be done in the context and spirit of this policy. The [Teaching Excellence](#) web pages and [Moodle](#) have more guidance on processes, tools and techniques which can support teaching and learning excellence.

5. Social media in your personal life

As a member of staff, you should be aware of your association with and responsibilities to the University. Any social media posts which directly or indirectly reference or associate with the University are covered within this policy as well as any posts which could bring the University into disrepute or impacts the safety of staff, students or

officers of the University. Staff should ensure that their personal profiles and related content are consistent with:

- social media platform providers terms and conditions
- the University's policies, including but not limited to: Data Protection, Dignity at Nottingham, Electronic Mail Usage and Information Security and our values
- your employment contract with the University
- how you would wish to present yourself professionally.

You should also be aware that any digital material that you post online could reach a wider audience than you would have expected or intended. Once digital content has been created and shared, you will have limited control over its permanence and audience.

6. Recruitment and the use of social media

In some circumstances social media may be used for the purposes of recruitment and can be useful in providing networks and recommendations from trusted sources. However, when recruiting through such channels, staff should be mindful that searches on social media might lead to concerns on the part of applicants that their protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity) may have played a part in a recruitment decision.

All recruitment should be undertaken in line with the University's Recruitment Policies. The [Recruitment website](#) has more details on the recruitment process.

Staff must not provide formal references or endorsements on behalf of the University for other individuals on social media and/or professional networking websites, as such references, whether positive or negative, may be attributed to the University and may create legal liability for both the author and the University.

7. Intellectual Property

All staff must ensure that they have permission to share any third-party materials, including, but not limited to, images, photographs, text and videos, before uploading them to or linking to them via social media and, where sharing is permitted such as memes, should ensure that such materials or shared links are credited appropriately.

In addition, it is the responsibility of all staff to check 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, you may be releasing ownership rights and control of the content. For this reason, you must always exercise caution in sharing information.

More information can be found within the Intellectual Property resources [here](#).

8. Brand

The University's identity and logo may only be used in accordance with the [University's brand guidelines](#).

9. Data Protection and Freedom of Information

Data protection law applies to social media as it does in other contexts. You must ensure that all posts comply with data protection law and the University's Data Protection Policy.

If you need any guidance, contact the Information Compliance Team data-protection@nottingham.ac.uk

No personal information, including photographs and videos, should be shared on social media without the consent of the individual to whom it relates. Staff should, therefore, never post other staff and/or student's and/or a third party's personal information without their [knowledge and consent](#).

Please be aware that individuals have the right to change their minds and so if required content may need to be withdrawn if requested.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 [and the right of Subject Access to personal data](#) applies to posts and content that are uploaded to official University websites, or any other website belonging to a public authority. As such, if a request for such information is received by the University (or other public authority), the content that you have posted may be disclosed.

10. Expected standards of behaviour

As an employee you can be associated with your employer, even if you do not make express reference to your job title or role with the University in your profile and you should be mindful of this when using social media.

All staff are responsible for:

- ensuring that any use of social media is carried out in line with this policy and other relevant policies detailed in section 2
- making sure that you have appropriate privacy settings and password security on any social media accounts to ensure that you are protecting your own privacy and restricting access to anything that you might post.
- informing the relevant staff member(s) when an institutional account is to be used and seeking relevant authorisation for official posts prior to publication (more details on the [social media guidelines for managing official University accounts](#))
- regularly monitoring, updating and managing content which you have posted for work purposes
- adding an appropriate disclaimer to personal accounts or posts so it is made clear that the account is private to avoid the impression that the views expressed are made on behalf of the University.
- Ensuring that any posts are aligned with the [University values](#)

Guidelines can be found within [section A, guidelines for using social media](#) within this document.

10a. Unacceptable Usage

The University promotes the right to free [speech](#) and academic freedom, and acknowledges that this does not exclude the right to offend, however, it is important to stress that it is also a qualified right. If your proposed communication is likely to offend colleagues or third parties, to adversely affect an individual's well-being, or to negatively affect the University's reputation, then there is a greater likelihood that your post or communication will nonetheless breach a different legal obligation and/or damage workplace relationships. If your communication is contentious, there is a greater onus on you to exercise caution. For further guidance, please refer to the University's statement on free [speech](#), our [values](#) and [dignity policy](#).

The following non-exhaustive summary that lists activity that could be considered unacceptable in nature and should not be shared on social media as it could bring the

University into disrepute or compromise the safety of colleagues, former colleagues, students and those connected with the University.

- any confidential information about the University and its associated entities, including subsidiary companies. This could include commercial information, details of legal proceedings or plans for business strategy or innovation
- personal information about another individual, including contact information, without their express permission
- malicious comments posted using anonymised or fake accounts or using another person's name without their consent
- promotion of a commercial product or service on behalf of the University which is not covered within the [External Work policy](#) or in line with the University [values](#).
- material, including images, that is threatening, harassing, discriminatory, illegal, obscene, indecent, defamatory, or hostile towards any individual or entity
- any other posting that constitutes a criminal offence
- social media content must not refer to, or include, information that is in conflict with the University's values is in any way inconsistent with an individual's contractual duties to the University or is in pursuance of unauthorised commercial activities.
- contact that is persistent, or demanding, as this may be considered as stalking even if the recipient is not a member of the University community.

11. Cyber Bullying including harassment and other dignity issues

As set out in the Free Speech [and Academic Freedom](#) statement the University will not tolerate any abuse, threats, incitement of violence, hatred, discrimination or other unlawful acts. Any debates about controversial ideas need to be inclusive, peaceful and civil and participants should not be intimidated or censored. Staff must be mindful and will be held accountable for any potential harm that could be caused by social media usage.

The following examples illustrate the types of behaviour, displayed through electronic communications, which the University considers to be forms of cyber bullying:

- maliciously spreading rumours, lies or gossip
- intimidating or aggressive behaviour
- offensive or threatening comments or content
- posting comments/photos etc. deliberately mocking an individual with the intent to harass or humiliate them
- stalking which is defined as persistent and unwanted attention that makes the recipient feel pestered and harassed.

Any employee who feels they are a victim of cyber bullying or any other dignity issues by another member of the University community, should raise this with their manager through [the Dignity at Nottingham Policy](#). If the behaviour is linked or directed to a member of the University, staff or student then it may be considered to be a breach of the University's Dignity Policy and potentially result in formal disciplinary action.

12. Incidents and response

Social media abuse should also be reported promptly and directly to the relevant social media platform. A guide to reporting abuse is covered in appendix 1.

Where staff are in receipt of any content where it is considered that a member of staff is in breach of this policy, this should be reported to the University via the reporting procedure covered in appendix 2.

When a breach of this policy is reported, the University will review the circumstances and decide on the most appropriate and proportionate course of action. This may include asking for the post to be removed or referring the matter to be dealt with under a different procedure such as the disciplinary, grievance or dignity procedure. Where reputational damage to the University is suspected this may also be escalated to an appropriate senior manager to assess any damage and take any corrective actions.

Any breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Disciplinary action may be taken regardless of whether or not the breach is committed during working hours and regardless of whether or not any University equipment or facilities are used in committing the breach.

Conduct which is also potentially a criminal offence, such as criminal harassment may also be reported to the police. Staff are reminded that mis-use of social media and electronic communications can also expose them to risk of civil legal action, for example defamation proceedings brought by third parties.

In addition staff can also report any malpractice through the [Whistleblowing procedure](#).

13. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every three years by representatives of the following areas -

- HR
- Legal
- Information Security
- External Relations

The next review date will be in January 2025.

Guidelines

A. Guidelines for using social media:

Social media offers many opportunities to engage with others, staff and students, to share research, ideas and events. Whilst using social media staff should be aware that they are accountable for any social media posts and the consequences of breaching this policy and guidelines (see section 12). This [Legal Podcast briefing](#) explains the key issues and highlights the Universities standards.

Each situation is different so these guidelines have been produced to help support you in making informed decisions when posting to social media.

- Always consider your audience – and potential audience. Anything you post can be forwarded on to other recipients and you are not able to control this.
- Ensure your posts are always aligned to the , the [Free Speech and Academic freedoms](#) and posts on behalf of the University are aligned to the University Strategy.
- It can be extremely difficult – if not impossible – to permanently delete content from social media, so anything you post now could re-emerge years later. It is important to remember that anything placed on social media will always be in the public domain and cannot be totally erased, therefore extra consideration is required before posting.
- Can you defend anything you post? People can read posts and either deliberately or unintentionally mis-interpret what you have said. Make sure your facts are accurate and you have followed the Free Speech [and Academic Freedom Guidelines](#), so you are able to defend your post.

- Never post in a hurry or as a knee jerk reaction to something – posts made when your judgement is impaired can be problematic if you say something that you may later regret. So, pause if your emotions are compromised.
- Everything that you post must have regard to the dignity of others; the University is committed to equality, diversity and inclusivity and anything that is posted must reflect that. Be conscious of how your words might be interpreted and of the fine lines between legitimate comment and hate speech or discrimination.
- Ensure that any posts do not breach the University's Electronic Communications Policy and that anything you forward or re-post that the original author is sufficiently informed in making the post. Be conscious about anything that you might forward or re-tweet, even if you did not mean it, it is likely to be perceived by others that you endorse any of the sentiments in the original post.
- You can also find short training on social media including social media awareness, personal social media in the workplace and twitter polices all employees should know on the short courses for staff and students [system](#).

B. Wellbeing Support and Resources

The University is committed to providing an environment which supports staff wellbeing whilst also supporting inclusive and civil debate. However, we recognise that the use of social media can present challenges to the wellbeing and sometimes even the safety of staff.

This section is designed to support staff members who are faced with abuse, threats, incitement of violence, hatred, discrimination or other unlawful acts from outside the University. Each situation is different and all the resources listed can be used dependent on circumstances.

If a staff member's physical or personal safety is at a risk whilst on campus you must immediately notify the [Security team](#) at security@nottingham.ac.uk or on 0115 951 3013 or 0115 951 8888 (for emergencies **ONLY**). If you are away from campus then please contact the police or local police station.

Staff members receiving abusive or threatening messages on social media may want to –

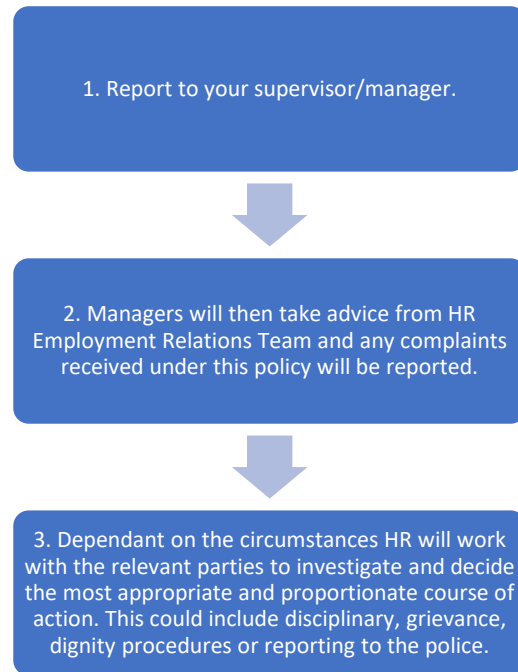
- Ignore agitators – social media agitators (known as trolls) try to elicit a response, they may move on if you ignore them. You may want to disengage with social media for a period or ask a friend to monitor your social media on your behalf.
- Use the platforms blocking options – the majority of social media platforms allow you to block others from seeing or commenting on your content. NB when you block someone they are typically notified that they have been blocked.
- Be cautious with responding - In most cases responding could prolong the social media harassment. Get additional support from your faculty/school should you wish to respond with a brief statement to correct any falsehoods.
- Record and report – if you feel you are being threatened then report this straight away to the social media platform and via your line manager (please see appendix 1). Remember to save any messages and screen shots as evidence.

*Please note, if the abuse/threat is from within the University i.e. another staff member or student the internal reporting process is detailed in section 11.

The following resources are available to staff for additional wellbeing support:

- [Dignity advisors](#) - impartial and confidential advice to support staff and students who have issues/concerns regarding harassment, bullying or victimisation.
- [Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#) – This is a free, confidential service for advice or counselling 24 hours a day
- [UoN Counselling Services](#)
- [Staff Networks](#) – BAME, Women, Carers, Disability, Neurodiversity and LGBTQ networks are available to speak to
- [Togetherall app](#) - a safe space for staff to engage anonymously with a wide network of people across the world who understand what it's like to struggle with mental health
- [Human Resources](#) – HR can help to find resources as well as assisting with any informal/formal action
- [Mental Health First Aiders](#) - a point of contact for member of staff or students who may be struggling
- Training for Academics for using Social Media will be available from Spring 2022 on the [University website](#).

Appendix 1 – Reporting Procedure for breaches of the Social Media Policy.



In addition, where staff feel that an electronic communication has breached the [Dignity at Nottingham Policy](#) they may wish to contact a [Dignity Advisor](#) to discuss this in the first instance prior to making a formal complaint about a member of staff or a student.