University of Stirling

Social Media Guidelines for University Staff

(Updated 2021)

Introduction

The following guidelines aim to offer guidance and direction on staff use of social media whilst working for the University of Stirling.

Being active on social media can benefit your professional life. It can help you engage with your audiences, share information and enhance your reputation. However, there are risks and occasionally consequences to using social media: people’s lives have become more transparent and personal and professional boundaries can become blurred.

These guidelines exist to make staff aware of how best to use social media to achieve a positive professional impact; how to separate professional use from personal use; and equally to raise awareness of the potential impact and consequences of any misuse.

The University maintains a number of social media accounts which have been established to communicate and represent the University’s official business. Such accounts are operated by authorised staff and follow the brand guidelines established by the University’s Communications, Marketing and Recruitment Directorate.

The University supports the right of staff to express their academic opinions in personal capacities, within the appropriate legal boundaries, when publishing content. The University’s Communications, Marketing and Recruitment Directorate can offer advice on content prior to publishing, especially where pertinent to potentially sensitive topics.

These guidelines advocate the use of social media but encourages staff to exercise caution and common sense, whilst outlining the standards of conduct expected from University of Stirling staff.

For the purposes of these guidelines the terms ‘staff’ and ‘associated staff’ refer to anyone holding a current contract of employment with the University; Research Postgraduates, agency staff carrying out University of Stirling business; any partnership staff who have a public alignment with the University such as honorary graduates; external examiners; those working as consultants or for third party companies involved in specific initiatives.

These Guidelines Cover:

* Freedom of speech and academic freedom
* Social media use in learning, teaching and research
* Social media use in personal life
* Expected standards of behaviour when using social media
* Use of the University’s brand
* Responsibilities of staff using social media
* Social media monitoring
* Data protection and its successor General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
* Intellectual property
* Cyber bullying via social media
* Guidance on breaches and potential consequences
* General Data Protection Regulations

These guidelines also reference other University policies and procedures, including:

* [Data Protection](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-academic-and-corporate-services/policy-and-planning/legal-compliance/data-protectiongdpr/)
* [Staff Ordinances](https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/services/policy-and-planning/university-calendar/68-ordinances-university-staff.docx)
* [HR Policies and guidance](https://www.stir.ac.uk//internal-staff/human-resources-and-organisation-development/policies-and-guidance/?)
* [Discipline Procedure for staff](https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/services/internal/hr/documents-moved/DisciplinaryProcedure.doc)
* [Equality and Diversity Policy](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-academic-and-corporate-services/policy-and-planning/equality-and-diversity/)
* [IS Acceptble Use Policy](https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/services/policy-and-planning/documents/08-Acceptable-Use-Policy.pdf)
* [Prevent](https://www.stir.ac.uk/prevent/prevent-strategy/)
* [Grievance procedure](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-academic-and-corporate-services/policy-and-planning/legal-compliance/publicationscheme/8-9-human-resources/)

1. **Guidelines statement**
   1. The University of Stirling (“University”) recognises and embraces the benefits and opportunities that social media offers to both academic and professional support staff. Social media can be used to engage audiences, share news, relevant information and successes, respond to enquiries, influence opinion-formers and enhance the reputation of both the individual and the University.
   2. Social media can be used to promote healthy academic debate – particularly around controversial subjects and areas of research. The advantage of social media is that that it provides a communication platform with huge, global reach and instant publishing – but this also carries with it inherent risks. Improper use of social media can impact on staff, students and the reputation of the University.
   3. These guidelines provide information for staff about the appropriate use of social media when representing the University, or by linking social media accounts to the University (when directly or indirectly referencing the University).

1. **Scope of guidelines**
   1. For the purpose of these guidelines, social media is defined as any online interactive tool that encourages participation, interaction and exchanges of communication. Social media is a rapidly-evolving form of communication and new channels continue to launch. In a brand context, these guidelines define “social media” as referring to any social media platform where the University of Stirling has a brand presence. For staff and professionals, this term covers a wider range of platforms. Examples of social media include but are not limited to:

* Facebook
* Twitter
* Flickr
* Instagram
* YouTube
* LinkedIn
* Snapchat
* Weibo
* WeChat
* Blogs, discussion forums, wikis
* Instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger
* Any website that allows public commenting or posting  
  1. These guidelines are intended for all staff as previously defined
  2. These guidelines apply to all social media communications directly or indirectly referencing the University made at any time, whether privately or publicly, and from anywhere, including locations away from campus and on personal devices, whether to an individual, to a limited group or to wider audiences.

1. **Freedom of speech and Academic Freedom**
   1. This guidance supports freedom of speech and academic freedom, subject to that freedom being expressed in a personal capacity and exercised within the appropriate legal boundaries.

1. **Using social media as a learning & teaching and/or research tool**
   1. Where social media is used as a learning & teaching and/or research dissemination tool through official University and social media accounts, all staff must read, understand and agree to both the terms of use of the social media site and the University’s policies which relate to the use of social media in this context before accessing and posting content on social media in a professional context.
   2. It is recommended that staff maintain their professional social media presence separately from their personal accounts.
   3. Care should be taken when linking multiple accounts and platforms in order to syndicate posts as this might cause inadvertent posting between professional and personal accounts.
2. **Social media in your personal life**
   1. As a member of staff at the University of Stirling, you should be aware of your association with and responsibilities to the University, and ensure your social media presence and related content are consistent with:

* The University’s policies, including but not limited to, data protection and its successor General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and information security
* The University’s [IT Use Policy](https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/services/policy-and-planning/documents/08-Acceptable-Use-Policy.pdf)
* Your personal presentation as a member of staff

Note - Your personal account(s) should carry a disclaimer noting that any views expressed are your own. Where a disclaimer is in place, you may still subject to disciplinary action if evidence is found that your social media account has been misused e.g. bullying, inflammatory comments, racism etc.

* 1. You must also be mindful of the potential impact, visibility and permanence of anything you publish online – whether on social media, websites, blogs, news sites or media or newspaper outlets. You should avoid publishing anything online that:
* You would not wish to be in the public domain
* You would not be willing to say in person to another individual
* May bring the University into disrepute
* May be taken as bullying or harassing
* May cause offence to other users and other members of staff or students
* May be of an inappropriate nature
  1. You should be aware that any digital content that you publish online – either personally or through a third party – could reach a wider audience than you originally anticipate. Once digital content has been published and shared, you will have limited control over its permanence and future audience.
  2. The University acknowledges that staff use social media in their private lives and for personal communications. Personal communications are those made on, or from, a private social media account such as a personal page on Facebook or personal blog. As noted in section 5.1, in all cases where a private social media account is used, and where appropriate disclaimers are in place, users are still subject to the terms laid out in the social media guidelines and other University policies (see section 6.4) which can include disciplinary action if users post content which could potentially bring the University’s reputation into disrepute

1. **Expected standards of behaviour when using social media**
   1. Members of University staff are personally responsible for what they communicate on or through social media. They should adhere to the standards of behaviour set out in these guidelines and any related policies (see section 6.4).
   2. Members of University staff must be respectful at all times on social media. Use of social media must not infringe on the rights or privacy of students, staff or third parties. Staff must not make ill-considered comments or judgements about students, staff or third parties.
   3. Staff must take particular care when communications through social media identify them as a member of University staff. Staff must also consider that friends or family linked on social media accounts will already likely be aware that the accounts holders workplace is the university
   4. Staff use of social media must comply with the University’s policies and procedures, including:

* [Academic freedom (Ordinance 68, part I)](https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/services/policy-and-planning/documents/AcademicFreedom-Ordinance68PartI.docx)
* [Staff Ordinances](https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/services/policy-and-planning/university-calendar/68-ordinances-university-staff.docx)
* [HR Policies and guidance](https://www.stir.ac.uk//internal-staff/human-resources-and-organisation-development/policies-and-guidance/?)
* [Discipline Procedure for staff](https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/services/internal/hr/documents-moved/DisciplinaryProcedure.doc)
* [Equality and Diversity Policy](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-academic-and-corporate-services/policy-and-planning/equality-and-diversity/)
* [IS Acceptble Use Policy](https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/services/policy-and-planning/documents/08-Acceptable-Use-Policy.pdf)
* [Prevent](https://www.stir.ac.uk/prevent/prevent-strategy/)
* [Grievance procedure](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-academic-and-corporate-services/policy-and-planning/legal-compliance/publicationscheme/8-9-human-resources/)
* [Absence Management Policy](https://www.stir.ac.uk/internal-staff/human-resources-and-organisation-development/policies-and-guidance/health-and-wellbeing/)
* [Codes of Practice](https://www.stir.ac.uk/registry/advisers/code/)
  1. The following non-exhaustive list may, according to the circumstances (and subject to 3.1), be considered of an unacceptable nature and should never be posted:

● Confidential information about research that is not yet in the public domain

● Personal information about students, staff or personnel matters

● Non-public, confidential or not yet approved University documents or information

● Details of complaints and/or legal proceedings – or potential legal proceedings – involving the University

● Personal information about another individual – including contact information – without their expressed permission

● Comments posted using fake accounts or using another person’s name without their consent

● Material that is threatening, harassing, discriminatory, illegal, obscene, racist, indecent, defamatory, or hostile towards any individual or entity

● Any other posting that constitutes a criminal offence

● Anything that may bring the University into disrepute or compromise the safety or reputation of colleagues, former colleagues, students, staff and those connected with the University

* 1. The University has well-established ways for staff to raise concerns or dissatisfaction they may have with any aspect of the University’s performance. Concerns should be raised through the appropriate channels, such as thoseset out in the staff [Grievance Procedure.](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-academic-and-corporate-services/policy-and-planning/legal-compliance/publicationscheme/8-9-human-resources/) Use of social media to vent frustrations/dissatisfaction against the University without first going through the established channels is inappropriate and may be subject to disciplinary procedures.

1. **The University Brand**
   1. The University’s name, identity and logo may only be used in accordance with the University’s brand guidelines.
   2. Information pertinent to the University’s brand guidelines can be found in [the University of Stirling Brand Bank](http://www.stir.ac.uk/brandbank/).
   3. Social media accounts that represent the University in any way should use the most up to date brand assets such as social media avatars, these can be found in the [the University of Stirling Brand Bank](http://www.stir.ac.uk/brandbank/).
2. **Responsibilities with regard to social media**

* All staff who use social media are responsible for:
* Ensuring that any use of social media is carried out in line with this and other relevant policies
* Seeking guidance from the Brand Bank and Communications, Marketing and Recruitment staff when an institution-affiliated account is to be created:
* Social Media Team: [digital@stir.ac.uk](mailto:digital@stir.ac.uk)

**Guidelines with regard to social media**

* We recommend that staff who use social media:
* Ensure, where appropriate, correct attribution for all shared content for official posts prior to publishing
* Seek, where appropriate, authorisation to use photographs in line with copyright law prior to publishing
* Regularly monitor, update and manage content they have posted in line with user expectations to ensure positive brand sentiment
* Add appropriate disclaimers to personal accounts when the institution is named or tagged, directly or indirectly
* Report any incidents or concerns in line with section 6.6 in the first instance to Communications, Marketing and Recruitment:
* Communications team: [communications@stir.ac.uk](mailto:communications@stir.ac.uk)
* Social Media Team: [digital@stir.ac.uk](mailto:digital@stir.ac.uk)

1. **Monitoring**
   1. The University reserves the right to monitor staff activities using its IT resources and communications systems. However, the very nature of social media means that most published content is in the public domain. The University reserves the right to take action where social media posts are not compliant with these guidelines or other University policies.

Monitoring may also be used as evidence in cases of a disciplinary offences. This may include, but is not limited to, absence management, conduct or gross misconduct, capabilities, grievances and any other relevant cases that may arise.

1. **Data Protection Act 1998 and Freedom of Information Act 2000**
   1. [The Data Protection Act 1998](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents) applies to social media as it does in other contexts. You must ensure that all published social media content complies with the Data Protection Act 1998 and its successor acts, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
   2. 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 never post students’ and/or staff and/or a third party’s personal information without their consent.
2. **Intellectual Property**
   1. All staff must ensure that they have permission to share any third-party materials, including all images, photographs, text and videos, before uploading them to or linking to them through social media. Where sharing is permitted, staff should ensure that such materials or shared links are credited properly.
   2. All staff must abide by the terms and conditions of the social media site when uploading content. By posting content to social media accounts, you may be releasing ownership rights and control of the content or potentially breaching copyright law. For this reason, exercise caution in sharing information.
3. **Cyber bullying via social media**
   1. The University does not accept any form of bullying or harassment by members of staff against any other University staff member or student or member of the public. The following examples are types of behaviour displayed through social media communications which the University considers to be forms of online bullying:

● Maliciously spreading rumours, lies or gossip

● Intimidating or aggressive behaviour

● Offensive or threatening content or comments

● Posting comments or photos or other media deliberately mocking an individual with intent to harass or humiliate them

Posting any form of content which is perceived as offensive or upsetting to any member of staff, student or member of public.

* 1. Online bullying might also take place via other means of electronic communication such as email, text or through instant messaging apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger or Snapchat or through anonymous channels such as ‘ghost’ social media accounts or platforms such as Tumblr etc.
  2. Any staff member who is experiencing online bullying via social media by a student or another member of University staff should raise any concerns through the [Grievance Procedure](https://www.stir.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-academic-and-corporate-services/policy-and-planning/legal-compliance/publicationscheme/8-9-human-resources/) in the first instance. Any member of staff who experiences online bullying may also seek support from HR
  3. Any staff member who is concerned about online bullying by anonymous ‘trolls’ – i.e. those behind social media accounts not affiliated to the University and created purely for malicious intent – should report this to the platform on which the incident(s) took place. Online incidents which cause staff to feel threatened or fear for their personal safety, may also be reported to authorities such as Police Scotland. The Social Media Team within CMR should also be notified at [digital@stir.ac.uk](mailto:digital@stir.ac.uk) to be made aware and for monitoring purposes
  4. Any member of staff found to be bullying others online will be considered to be in breach of University policy and could be subject to disciplinary procedures.

**13. Potential consequences**

1. Where a breach of any University policy is reported, the University will review the circumstances and decide on the most appropriate and proportionate course of action, which may include referring the matter to be dealt with under one of the policies referenced in section 6.4.
   1. Where staff are in receipt of any content considered to be in breach of University policy, this should be reported to the University via Faculty or to the Communications, Marketing and Recruitment Directorate. ([digital@stir.ac.uk](mailto:digital@stir.ac.uk))
   2. Complaints received should be reported to the relevant body within the University
   3. Any breach of University policies could result in disciplinary action up to and including summary dismissal
   4. Any disciplinary action will be taken in accordance with the procedures outlined in the[Human Resources & Organisational Development Discipline Procedure.](https://www.stir.ac.uk/media/stirling/services/internal/hr/documents-moved/DisciplinaryProcedure.doc)
   5. Disciplinary action may be taken whether any University equipment or facilities are used in committing the breach. Action may also be taken in the absence of a complaint (i.e. where it is discovered and raised as part of regular social media monitoring activity by CMR social media team)
   6. Where conduct may result in criminal activity, the University may report the matter to the police.