



Ulster University - Staff Social Media Guidance Protocols February 2021

Introduction And Background

Ulster University recognises that social media channels provide unique opportunities to participate in discussions and share information on topics of interest to its entire community. Through social media activity and engagement on services such as, but not limited to, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram, students can enrich learning and study, as well as personal lives and career opportunities.

These protocols offer advice and guidance to all Ulster University staff members who are using (or considering using) social media in any capacity. It has been compiled to help staff understand the reputational, legal and ethical implications of engaging in online communication of this nature – and what can happen if social media is misused, whether intentionally or otherwise.

These protocols do not sit in isolation, and staff members need to be aware that a number of other relevant University policies, guidelines and values exist which are relevant to their conduct while using social media. Ulster University's community is characterised by values that define our ethos and underpin the delivery of everything we do at Ulster University. Many of our values have relevance in the social media environment:

- being accountable for what we say and do;
- confidence and taking pride in our achievements;
- equality, diversity and inclusiveness;
- respect for ourselves and others; and
- openness and honesty in our dealings with others.

We love hearing stories from and learning about our Ulster University community. Please be aware that we, Ulster University, reserves the right to copy, use, distribute and disclose without compensation to you any content, comments or quotes that you either post on our social media pages or tag us in (@ulsteruni). This includes any ideas or information relating to Ulster University which we might find via hashtags including but not limited to, #ulsteruni, #ulsteruniversity, #UUB, #UUBC, #UUJ, #UUM, #WeAreUU, #WeBelieveInBrave, #WeMindYourMood, #WeBuildCareers and #WeMakeItHappen.

Protocols Outline

Our protocols are designed to encourage Ulster University staff to use social media sites in a responsible way, taking advantage of the opportunities for networking, discussion, debate and information-sharing, without putting at risk their personal security, their current or future career prospects, or the reputation of the University.

Our protocols aim to:

- encourage the responsible use of social media by Ulster University staff
- raise awareness of relevant UK legislation and regulations, and relevant Ulster University policies
- outline the responsibilities of individuals for the use of social media for University purposes
- highlight the potential risks of using social media for personal use
- promote effective and innovative use of social media as an integral part of the University's Public Relations activities
- provide clear guidelines on how breaches of these protocols will be addressed
- protect the reputation of the University, its students, staff, and partner organisations.

General Protocol Principles

It is the responsibility of staff to read and act in accordance with the principles of these protocols. It is also the responsibility of staff to read and act in accordance with the rules and guidelines set out by individual social media, social networking and website hosting companies and providers.

Our protocols apply to the use of social media for both business and personal purposes, whether during office hours or otherwise. They apply whether the social media channels are accessed using University IT facilities and equipment or, via personal equipment belonging to members of staff.

Social media must only be used in ways that do not breach University policies, rules, statutes, regulations or ordinances. For example, staff should not use social media in ways that breach the University's Dignity at Work and Study (Bullying and Harassment) Policy, the University's Disciplinary processes, the University's Acceptable Use of IT Code of Practice, the Equal Opportunities Policy or the General Data Protection Regulation Policy.

Responsibilities Of Staff Using A Personal Online/Social Media Presence

Ulster University recognises that many staff make use of social media in a personal capacity. Staff should apply Ulster University values when posting content on personal social media channels. Whilst not acting on behalf of the University, staff must be aware of associations that could be made when posting on personal social media channels, remaining cognizant of potential damage to the University's reputation that could occur if individuals are recognised as Ulster University employees.

It is essential that staff respect the privacy and the feelings of others at all times, and understand that the content posted via social media is a permanent record which is shared instantaneously with a potential global audience.

Irrespective of privacy settings applied to personal accounts, all online social media posts have the potential to become public.

Staff must also be aware that many of our prospective students are minors (younger than 18 years of age) and that interactions with these persons should always be approached with caution, ensuring that the content of conversations / responses is suitable for under 18s.

Staff must not use the University's brand on personal social media sites or other personal websites.

A staff member's personal online or social media profile may reference the University's name as their place of work, but it must be made clear that comments/posts/shares made by the account holder are made in a personal capacity only. Staff should include a simple and visible disclaimer such as: "The views I express are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer" for clarity.

Any communication by an Ulster University staff member made in a personal capacity through social media must not:

- do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassing of, any individual e.g., making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age;
- contain images or other content that is sexually explicit or illegal;

- bring discredit to the University in any way e.g., by insulting fellow staff or other individuals; making/sharing defamatory or offensive comments about individuals or groups; liking/posting/sharing/linking to images or other content that is inappropriate, sexually explicit or illegal;
- breach copyright: e.g., by using someone else's images or content without permission, or by failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce. This means, for example, not posting articles or pictures scanned from newspapers or magazines. posting such content may result in legal action by the copyright owner;
- breach confidentiality: for example, by revealing confidential information owned by the University; posting confidential information about an individual, business or other organisation; posting contact details, pictures or personal details of other students or members of staff or members of the public without their prior permission. Staff must seek prior advice from their Manger if unclear about what information might be deemed confidential.

Further information on the responsibilities of students in relation to data protection is contained under point 7 of the University's General Data Protection Regulations Policy, available at:

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/286008/GDPR-Policy-clean-final-version-14-Jan-20-.pdf

If there is any doubt about the accuracy of information to be shared on a social media network or site, then staff should refrain from posting, commenting, liking or sharing this information.

PR Opportunities

The University's PR team is responsible for managing both proactive positive PR opportunities and reactive issues.

The experienced team will consider all potential stories and where there is an opportunity to target an audience or audiences via one or more channels, then the PR team will action and draw up an appropriate PR plan or schedule of activities.

This includes selecting from a range of activities from press releases and photography to media briefings, broadcast interviews and, social media posts.

Given the extremely competitive media environment it is critical that staff engage with the PR team as early as possible and before posting anything on social media. Once a post appears it becomes old news and the more traditional media outlets will have limited interest, making it impossible for the University to maximise its positive press coverage.

By engaging with the PR team, we can ascertain the broader PR action, if any, and maximize the PR potential of the story – including on social media. If there isn't a broader PR opportunity covering multiple channels, the PR team will provide guidance on how staff can maximise it via their social media channels.

Potential stories and social media support requests should be emailed to pressoffice@ulster.ac.uk and the PR team will advise on the approach to be taken, covering sequencing and scheduling within 48 hours of requests being made.

Additional Responsibilities Of Staff Using Social Media

The University logo must be used on official University social media and other online channels that could reasonably be perceived as associated with the University.

This will include, for example, accounts established for University Faculties, Schools, Research Institutes, Centres and Departments. Approved official accounts will be agreed by the University PR team and enquiries to request new accounts should be directed to pressoffice@ulster.ac.uk.

It is important to bear in mind that centralised accounts are more effective at engaging a wider audience than numerous, smaller accounts so requests for new accounts will only be considered if there is no current account which could be readily accessed.

Staff should be aware that they will represent the University as a corporate body at all times when posting comments, liking, sharing or responding to comments made by others from official Ulster University social media accounts. All post, likes and shares from official accounts will be neutral, not expressing an opinion and remain apolitical.

Where the University encourages staff to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media channels on behalf of the University, this is because it is recognised that it is an important part of how the University communicates with its stakeholders, enhancing communication and networking between staff, students and partner organisations.

Staff may contribute to the University's social media activities, e.g. by writing a blog, managing a social media account and day-to-day running of official social media accounts for the University in accordance with the standards set by the PR team.

The University accepts that staff may wish to use their own computers or devices, such as laptops, tablets and mobile telephones, to access social media websites while they are at work. Such use should be in accordance with this policy.

Staff who use social media as part of their work for the University must adhere to the same safeguards that they would apply with all forms of communication about the University in the public sphere, including:

- Making sure that the communication has a purpose and a benefit for Ulster University.
- Obtaining permission from their manager before embarking on a public campaign using social media.
- Getting a colleague to check the content before it is published.

Any communication that staff make in a professional capacity through social media must not:

Breach confidentiality, for example by:

- revealing confidential intellectual property or information owned by Ulster University; or
- providing confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague) or organisation (such as a partner institution); or
- discussing the internal workings of Ulster University (such as agreements that the University is reaching with partner institutions/customers or its future business plans that have not been communicated to the public); or

Do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, for example by:

- making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age; or
- using social media to bully another individual (such as another staff member of the University); or
- posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content; or

Bring Ulster University into disrepute, for example by:

- making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups; or
- posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content; or

Breach copyright, for example by:

- using someone else's images or written content without permission; or failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something.

Use Of Social Media During Working Hours

Any use of social media which is outside that required for work purposes will fall under existing University Codes of Practice for IT usage.

The University reserves the right to monitor employees' internet usage in accordance with its Acceptable Use Code Of Practice,

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/335791/Acceptable-Use-of-Information-Technology-CoP.pdf

In the course of normal business, the use of University networks, systems and services are monitored by authorised personnel for the following general purposes:

- to ensure acceptable use;
- to safeguard integrity, security and availability;
- to facilitate capacity planning and optimise performance;
- to assist in fault investigation and incident handling;
- to investigate any suspected or actual breaches of University policy;
- unauthorised use or criminal activity;
- to gather evidence for investigative or disciplinary purposes;

Details of Information Technology Monitoring are contained in the University's IT Monitoring Policy and IT Monitoring Code of Practice,

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/335799/IT-Monitoring-Policy.pdf

Why Should We Use Social Media For University Business?

Academic uses – the University recognises that social media has the potential to support and advance learning opportunities and encourages its use in this way. Where existing supported learning technologies offer equivalent functionality e.g. Blackboard, consideration should be given to the most effective medium.

Communications and External Relations uses – the University recognises the opportunity to communicate with prospective and existing stakeholder audience groups through social media.

Alumni uses – the University recognises the opportunity to communicate with existing students and alumni through social media to develop and maintain an on-going relationship with them.

Collaborative uses – the University supports both internal and external collaboration and we acknowledge that social media channels can provide opportunities to support this work.

Students' Union uses – the Students' Union and Sports Union will use social media to maximise the exposure of its services and associated societies and sports clubs to existing and prospective students. These dedicated channels will remain the responsibility of the Students' Union and Sports Union.

Recruitment And Social Media

Social media may be used in the recruitment of Ulster University employees in the following ways:

- The University may use social media to bring vacancies to the attention of potential applicants.
- The University may use social media to identify potential applicants as part of executive search activity.

It is not appropriate for the University or staff members use social media to research the private life of potential job applicants.

Opening New Or Closing Existing Social Media Accounts

Staff who wish establish an official University social media channel must contact the University's PR team by emailing pressoffice@ulster.ac.uk for guidance. Official social

media channels will be correctly named and brand aligned with support and training provided to ensure adherence with Ulster University's Social Media Framework and guidelines.

Any staff member who already maintains an official University social media site and wishes to close it should contact the University PR team by emailing pressoffice@ulster.ac.uk for assistance in sequencing and managing this process to ensure followers are not lost.

Breaches Of The Protocols

The University monitors social media on a daily basis, in particular, references to the University online and will act where necessary to protect its reputation.

The University reserves the right to request the removal of any content deemed to be in breach of these protocols.

The University has the right to request the removal of content from an official social media account and/or from a personal staff social media channel if it is deemed that the account or its content breaches these protocols

If any staff member acts in a manner which breaches these protocols and procedures, they may be liable to disciplinary action under the University's Disciplinary Procedures.

These existing policies are available at:

<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/peopleandculture/policies/disciplinary-procedures>

Staff may also be subject to the University's Dignity at Work and Study (Bullying and Harassment) Policy and Procedures, available at:

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/121162/DWSP-2017.pdf

Where a staff member is alleged to have breached these protocols and procedures, the matter will be investigated and dealt with using the procedures set out in the existing staff disciplinary procedures.

Complaints

Serious breaches of these protocols, for example, incidents of bullying colleagues via social media or social media activity causing damage to the University, may constitute gross misconduct and may lead to action under the Disciplinary Procedure.

Complaints concerning the misuse of social media by Ulster University staff will be investigated by the line manager of the person complained of, and may result in the staff disciplinary procedures being invoked.

Complaints about cyberbullying will be dealt with using the procedures set out in the University's Dignity at Work and Study (Bullying & Harassment) Policy & Procedures.

Complaints about social media misuse by an Ulster staff member should be directed to the PR team by emailing pressoffice@ulster.ac.uk in the first instance. Complaints will be logged and referred to the appropriate University authorities for action.

Where a complaint involves threatening or potentially criminal online social media behaviour, the matter will also be reported to the PSNI for investigation.

This will include, but is not limited to, complaints in which a staff member is alleged to have:

- posted online photos or videos of people in a place where he or she would expect privacy;
- threatened violence;
- accessed or shared child pornography;
- sent sexually explicit images or photos;
- engaged in stalking, or
- committed a hate crime.

This list is not exhaustive. Please see section 5.2 Unacceptable Use and section 5.2.1 Illegal Materials in the Ulster University Acceptable Use Code of Practice for the categories of use and materials which are unacceptable.

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/335791/Acceptable-Use-of-Information-Technology-CoP.pdf

Implementation

The University will ensure that these protocols and procedures and the appropriate procedures are implemented and disseminated and are kept under regular evaluation and review, in line with standard University procedures.

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Contacts And Further Information

Ulster University PR team pressoffice@ulster.ac.uk Tel: 028 9036 6178

Useful Links

Ulster University's Rules for dealing with cyberbullying

<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/peopleandculture/employee-benefits/equality-diversity/dignity-at-work/cyber-bullying>

Ulster University's site containing information about dignity at work and study

<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/peopleandculture/employee-benefits/equality-diversity/dignity-at-work>

Google's guide to online safety and security

<http://www.google.co.uk/goodtoknow/online-safety/>

Showcasing examples of social media use that have resulted in legal action

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-20782257>

Related Policies

The policy does not sit in isolation and staff need to be aware that a number of other relevant policies and guidelines exist which are relevant to conduct while using social media.

Staff need to be aware of and abide by all relevant policies and guidelines during their time at Ulster University.

Our protocol and procedures seek compliance with the following legislation:

- The Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 Communications)
- Regulations 2000 Communications Act 2003
- Computer Misuse Act 1990
- Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988
- Copyright (Computer Programs) Regulations 1992
- Data Protection Act (2018)
- Electronic Communications Act 2000
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Health & Safety at Work (NI) Order (1997)
- Malicious Communications (NI) Order 1988
- Obscene Publications Act 1994
- Official Secrets Acts 1911-1989
- Protection from Harassment (NI) Order (1997)
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
- Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998)
- The Telecommunications (Lawful Business Practice)
- Terrorism Act 2000

The following University policies are relevant to this policy:

Acceptable Use of Information Technology Code of Practice

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/335791/Acceptable-Use-of-Information-Technology-CoP.pdf

Charter, Statutes, Ordinances and Regulations

<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/about/governance/ordinance-and-regulations>

Copyright Policy

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/357504/Copyright-Policy-2019-20-1Ulster.pdf

Dignity at Work and Study (Bullying & Harassment) Policy and Procedures

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/121162/DWSP-2017.pdf

Equal Opportunities Policy

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/122902/EO-Policy-2016.pdf

GDPR Policy

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/286008/GDPR-Policy-clean-final-version-14-Jan-20-.pdf

IT Monitoring Policy

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/335799/IT-Monitoring-Policy.pdf

Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/291737/Protection-of-Children-and-Vulnerable-Adults-2018.pdf

Staff Disciplinary Procedures

<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/peopleandculture/policies/disciplinary-procedures>

User Account & Access Policy

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/335806/User-Account-and-Access-Policy.pdf

Definitions And Clarification

Bullying is defined, as unfair treatment, excessive criticism, or persistent nit-picking, intimidating, aggressive or undermining behaviour, which makes the recipient(s), feel upset, humiliated, threatened or vulnerable and undermines their self-confidence and integrity.

Cyberbullying is the use of the Internet and related technologies to harm or harass other people, in a deliberate, repeated, and hostile manner.

Harassment is unwanted conduct based on the grounds of religious belief, political opinion, sex (including gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status), race/ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or age which has the purpose or effect of violating that person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person. Differences of attitude, background or culture and the misinterpretation of social signals can mean that what is perceived as harassment by one person may not seem so to another; nevertheless, this does not make it acceptable. It is the purpose or effect of the behaviour rather than the motive that must be considered.

Social Media refers to online channels of communication that allow users to interact in the public domain by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interest. It includes, but is not limited to, social networking services such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, WhatsApp, wikis and blogs.