

Guidelines for the use of Social Media at UWS

Version 4 – February 2025

Procedure Author – IT Security and Customer Service Manager

Guidelines Owner – Vice Principal (Finance and Infrastructure)

Parent Policy Statement – Information Services Policy Statement

Public Access or Staff Only Access – Public

Version 4 – February 2025

Changes and Reason for Changes – Minor updates.



Guidelines for the use of Social Media at UWS

Contents

Introduction	1
What is 'social media'?	1
What and who are these guidelines for?	1
University policies	1
Using social media for teaching and learning and professional practice.....	2
Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom	2
The Guidelines	3
The right tool for the right job	3
Representing the University	4
Personal responsibility	4
Guidance	5
Staying legal and safe	5
Personal and professional.....	6
Intellectual Property	7
Cyber Bullying	7
Getting it right.....	7

Guidelines for the use of Social Media at UWS

Introduction

The University of the West of Scotland recognises the benefits and opportunities social media can bring to the institution. Social media allows the sharing of news, information updates with important developments and promote healthy academic debate about controversial subjects and areas of research. There is, however, an inherent risk involved in using such immediate and far-reaching forms of communication. Inappropriate use can have a negative impact on staff, students 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 both yourself and the University.

This guideline provides information for members of staff as to the appropriate use of social media when acting on behalf of or referencing the University.

The impact of these guidelines will be monitored regularly to reflect the changing online environment and technologies. The guidelines may also be amended where particular concerns are raised or where an incident has been recorded.

What is 'social media'?

For the purpose of the guidelines, social media is defined as any online interactive tool or application which encourages participation, interaction and communication exchanges. New forms of social media appear on a regular basis and include Facebook, Flickr, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Tik-Tok, WhatsApp and X, additionally, blogs, discussion forums, instant messaging and any website that allows public commenting or posting. Some international regions will also have their own platforms, such as Weibo in China which is also included.

The way in which staff conduct themselves as individuals and as employees of UWS when using social media should stay consistent and appropriate. Professional practice should be maintained at all times.

What and who are these guidelines for?

These guidelines concern the acceptable use of any and all social media platforms by UWS staff, students and representatives including contract and agency workers.

They outline the standards anyone associated with the University are expected to meet when using social media and representing the University online. They are, essentially, a guide to what we should expect of each other as UWS colleagues and what others should expect of us when we represent the University in an online environment.

University policies

These guidelines are intended to be easy to follow and offer a framework for colleagues when using social media. They are not formal regulations and are not intended to be exhaustive.

The UWS IT Acceptable Use Statement provides the formal regulations that UWS staff and students must take into account when using social media. Be aware that any information security breach occurring as a result of social media use will be treated in the

same way as inappropriate behaviour in any other context and may be subject to disciplinary action. Following the guidelines should help to ensure that you are able to avoid such an eventuality.

If you require further advice or become aware of a potential issue with the use of social media by a colleague, you should speak to your line manager or another senior member of staff.

Using social media for teaching and learning and professional practice

Where using social media as a teaching and learning tool, it should be done in the context and spirit of these guidelines, ensuring the expected standards of behaviour are always observed by staff and students.

The University is active on social media through the main UWS social media accounts. If you need advice or help with any aspect of social media use beyond these guidelines, email the social media team at digital@uws.ac.uk. If you require advice or information regarding the information security aspect of social media contact helpdesk@uws.ac.uk

You can find our main social media accounts as follows:

- Facebook: Like us on <https://www.facebook.com/UniWestofScotland>
- Twitter: Follow @UniWestScotland on <https://twitter.com/UniWestScotland>
- Instagram: <https://instagram.com/uniwestscotland/>
- YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/UniWestofScotland>
- Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/uniwestscotland>

Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom

Nothing in this guidance is intended to have the effect of limiting either freedom of speech or academic freedom, subject to that freedom being exercised within the law.

The Guidelines

Through the Corporate Strategy, UWS aim to develop a culture where our people are supported to be highly motivated, creative and collaborative. Encouraging the use of social media is a key element of this culture.

Use of social media is encouraged as it provides:

- access to a world-wide audience.
- easy and cost-effective dialogue with a range of stakeholders
- contact with like-minded individuals and organisations
- a way to stay in touch with alumni, partners and the wider community
- an innovative way to teach, learn and research
- an essential tool for a 21st century university

We encourage the embedding of social media into the working practices for the benefit of our staff and students including:

- blogging and micro-blogging
- maintaining professional networks and contacts (e.g. LinkedIn, Academia.edu)
- making best use of online learning environments
- image, video and audio-sharing (e.g. YouTube, Soundcloud)

Social media is an essential part of our engagement with our communities and understand that it is a global medium that does not operate within traditional workplace norms regarding use of equipment or personal/professional divisions.

We do acknowledge however that the use of social media requires caution. We wish to support colleagues to ensure that in using social media they do not fall foul of our internal policies and procedures or the law. The following guidelines aim to provide a framework for the use of social media by staff at UWS that both encourages and protects the University, its staff, students and stakeholders.

The right tool for the right job

- Research the various social media tools available before deciding on which suits your need. Think about your audience, ask advice from colleagues, and above all spend some time using the site or service yourself before getting started.
- Be sure that you can make the time commitment to support whatever service you plan to use. Social media doesn't work on a 9-5 time frame and other users can have what might, to you, be unrealistic expectations about response times and levels of participation. You need to be able to manage these expectations so choose a tool that allows you to do that or be sure that you can commit to the response times users will expect.
- Do not commit to too many different sites or services or you will not be able to keep up with it all or find a way of integrating different platforms. A failure to participate effectively can be bad for your reputation and the University's.
- Social media sites may change or disappear at short notice so make sure that you have a 'plan B' for continuing your activity and that you keep multiple copies of any important content.

- Remember that the University has standard tools that you still need to use, for example, email remains our principal route for electronic communication and the VLE our main teaching and learning platform. While social media allows you to communicate and teach in other ways, beware of excluding colleagues and students who may not have ready access to it.
- Failing to update and engage with your account can damage both your reputation and the University's.
- Uploading course notes, exam papers or any data considered to be the intellectual property of UWS must not be uploaded via social media or to document sharing sites such as 'Coursehero' or 'StudentShare'.

Representing the University

Remember that you are representing the University when you are engaged in social media activity. Even when that activity may be personal in nature, you are a member of the UWS community and should ensure your actions do not bring the University or yourself into disrepute. Avoid:

- criticising or arguing with students, customers, colleagues, partners or competitors.
- using social media to air internal grievances.
- making defamatory comments about the University, individuals or other organisations or groups.
- making offensive or derogatory comments or using a social media platform to bully another person.
- engaging in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace.
- posting images, videos or audio files that are inappropriate or offensive to others or linking to such content.
- engaging in any activity that may be illegal.
- engaging in the distribution of spam or phishing content.
-

Personal responsibility

Remember that you are personally responsible for any content you publish via social media. This means that you need to take care not to post any material that might fall under the categories noted in the previous section or any other material that you are not willing and able to vouch for as appropriate and legal.

Recent court cases have shown that the law regards comments made on social media as being 'published', that is, as having the same status as an article in a newspaper or magazine. This means that they are subject to the same laws in relation to offences such as defamation. It is easy to regard an X conversation, as being like a face-to-face discussion, but comments made on X are publicly available and should be treated as such.

The University does not encourage staff to hide behind pseudonyms or anonymous social media accounts, and never to enable the making of inappropriate or offensive comments. Clearly identify yourself on social media and take responsibility for your actions, following the advice in these guidelines.

Guidance

Social media is a terrific way to engage with students and other staff, and UWS want to encourage involvement in a responsible way, so we offer the following general guidelines for posting content and avoiding the pitfalls:

- write in the first person and identify yourself and your role where possible.
- remember, social media content is in the public domain so edit your comments accordingly – think before you post!
- if in doubt, ask a colleague to check your proposed content, or ask your line manager.
- if still in doubt, don't post it.
- think about your intended audience when presenting your content.
- be open, honest and fair in your comments and consider their impact on others.
- consider how your content may influence people's perceptions of you and/or the University.
- on personal accounts, make it clear that you are not speaking on behalf of the University and add a disclaimer to biographies, avatars, information pages and blog posts that states that the views expressed are yours and not those of UWS.
- if you make a mistake, admit it and apologise immediately.
- if you inadvertently post inaccurate information correct or remove it as soon as possible.
- be conciliatory and respectful.
- don't wade into an already heated discussion, you will almost always make it worse, whatever your intentions.
- don't post content or contribute to a discussion when you are angry or upset.
- never pretend to be someone else or use alternative online identities to support your views.
- remember that the message of 'taking care' applies everywhere, no matter what the 'privacy' settings, your intended audience, or if it's a 'direct' or 'private' message. Any messages, even if you think they're private, can be easily shared and passed on (screengrabs, for example). Assume anything can be seen by anyone.

If, after following these guidelines, you are still concerned that you may have posted something inappropriate or been drawn into a potentially damaging discussion, inform the University's Marketing team immediately.

Staying legal and safe

There are guidelines to follow to ensure that you and the University are on the right side of the law and that you are able to stay safe while using social media:

- do not post personal or confidential information about yourself, students, staff, suppliers, or customers.
- do not reveal confidential intellectual property information or any information that is commercial and in confidence.
- do not discuss internal University issues on a public forum (such as contractual issues, detailed business plans and information relating to human resources or legal issues)

- respect copyright and intellectual property rights: do not publish third party content without written permission, use brief quotes only for the purposes of comment or review, always quote accurately.
- do not engage in social media that promotes extremism or terrorism.
- always check terms and conditions before linking to a third-party website and make sure that the user is aware that they are following a link to another person's content.
- always read the terms and conditions of any social media platform you use and ensure that you comply with them.
- avoid publishing your personal contact details on an open forum and never publish anyone else's contact details.

By following these guidelines, you can ensure that you make the most of the potential of social media for your own benefit and that of the University without placing UWS or yourself under undue risk.

Personal and professional

The University recognises that social media doesn't fit neatly into 'work' and 'personal' boxes. It doesn't recognise the traditional 9-5 working day. Many of us routinely access work email and work files on personal devices that we can use via Wi-Fi both at work and at home. While there is no expectation that staff will access work-related information outside their contracted hours it is accepted that new technology has resulted in the blurring of the lines between work and personal devices and media.

We recommend that staff keep their work and personal social media identities separate to minimise the risk of confusion between their professional and personal lives. However, we do accept that this is not always an efficient or effective way for colleagues to get the most out of social media.

The following points recognise this dilemma and provide some key guidelines for the personal use of social media:

- when using personal social media accounts, you should continue to be aware of the potential for people to recognise you as being a member of UWS staff.
- as you may be recognised as a member of UWS staff, you should apply the same approach to your personal as to your professional accounts.
- you should feel free to reference your work for the University when using personal accounts but be clear that you are expressing personal opinions not those of UWS.
- you may mention in biographies and other locations that you work for the University, but again you should ensure that you include an appropriate disclaimer.
- bear in mind that even when using personal social media accounts that do not mention UWS you could still commit a breach of one of the University policies if you are recognised as a member of staff and are engaging in inappropriate behaviour online.

Intellectual Property

- 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 via social media and, where sharing is permitted, should ensure that such materials or shared links are credited appropriately.
- All staff must 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 exercise caution in sharing all information.

The University is not responsible for, nor does it hold any ownership of any content posted by its staff, other than content posted by staff using University accounts, or in the course of their duties, as a form of professional communication.

Cyber Bullying

- The University will not accept any form of bullying or harassment of or by members of university staff or students.
- The following examples illustrate the types of behaviour, displayed through social media 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.

Getting it right

It is inevitable that guidelines like this tend to contain rather more 'don'ts' than 'do's', but that shouldn't hide the fact that UWS actively encourages its staff to develop their use of social media for their own benefit and that of the University.

Finally, the key messages of these guidelines are:

Do...

- ✓ integrate social media into your teaching and professional practice
- ✓ use social media to promote UWS
- ✓ engage with a wide range of people via social media services
- ✓ make the most of social media to develop your online presence
- ✓ learn, explore, connect and expand your horizons via social media
- ✓ play your part in promoting UWS globally

Don't...

- ✗ take risks with your own or the University's reputation
- ✗ fall foul of copyright, intellectual property or other legal issues
- ✗ behave inappropriately or intimidate other social media users
- ✗ miss the opportunity to get the maximum benefit from social media