

Staff Social Media Policy

1. Introduction

Queen's University Belfast (the 'University') is a world-class international university that supports outstanding students and staff, working in world-class facilities, conducting leading-edge education and research, which is focused on the needs of society.

The University is committed to leading the way in social media. The Social Media Policy for Staff (the 'Policy') has been created to ensure that all staff (which for the purposes of this Policy relates to employees together with workers and self-employed contractors, i.e. the extended workforce) are supported to use social media in an effective, positive and proactive manner.

Except where otherwise stated, this Policy does not form part of any contract of employment and the University may amend it at any time.

The Social Media Manager (or anyone else designated by the University) is responsible for monitoring and implementing this Policy. If you have any questions or comments regarding this Policy, please contact the Social Media Manager via: socialmedia@qub.ac.uk.

2. Scope of the Policy

The term 'social media' has come to encompass a wide range of tools, which allow users to interact in the digital arena as an active member or passive observer.

For the purpose of this Policy, social media will refer to platforms that facilitate users to collaborate or interact socially by sharing opinions, interests, content and information publicly, privately or anonymously. This will include, but not be limited to, social networking platforms (for example, Facebook/Weibo/Twitter/Instagram/LinkedIn), dark social (for example, Snapchat and Facebook Messenger) and online forums (for example, The Student Room).

It is important to note that **email is not included in the remit of this Policy**. Acceptable use of email is covered by the 'Computer Resources – Acceptable Use Policy' which is available at: <http://go.qub.ac.uk/itpolicies>.

Content from private messaging platforms or groups (e.g. WhatsApp) will not be monitored, but will fall under the remit of this Policy if the University receives a complaint regarding content.

This Policy recognises the benefits that the use of social media can bring for staff and the institution and outlines the standards that the University requires staff to observe when using social media (both inside and outside of the workplace), the circumstances in which the University will monitor use of social media, and the action the University will take if this Policy is not followed.

This Policy applies to all staff who are using social media on behalf of, or in connection with, or in any way which relates to, or can be associated with, the University.

This Policy does not seek to regulate how staff use social media in a purely private capacity, provided that such use has no association or potential association with the University or its activities.

This Policy applies where:

- The member of staff's use of social media relates directly or indirectly to the University or its activities. For example, being seen to be aligned with the University, or directly or indirectly referencing the University on social media, but not on behalf of the University.
- The member of staff's use of social media relates to or is otherwise connected with the member of staff's work at the University, whether the intended use is personal or professional.
- The member of staff is identifiable as someone employed by, or working for, or on behalf of, or in connection with, or in any way which relates to, or can be associated with, the University.

Where the Policy relates to staff in the extended workforce who are not employed by the University, such as workers, contractors or visiting academics, the manager overseeing the individual, team, agency or organisation will be responsible for making them aware of this Policy.

2.1 Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is fundamental to Queen's. Therefore, this Policy does not restrict the principles of academic freedom as defined by the 1988 Education Reform Act.

The 1988 Education Reform Act established the legal right of academics in the UK to: *question and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or the privileges they have.*

2.2 Freedom of Information

Freedom of Information requests can be made in relation to University-affiliated social media accounts. If such a request is received, please forward it to: info.compliance@qub.ac.uk

2.3 Purpose of the Policy

Social media has revolutionised how we engage with colleagues, thought-leaders and society as a whole. The purpose of this Policy is to ensure all staff can fully utilise and harness social media to its full potential, in a safe, legal and ethical way. It is the responsibility of each user to adhere to this Policy. Where inappropriate use of social media may constitute an offence under criminal law, referral will be made to the appropriate authorities. Users in breach of the Policy may be subject to investigation and/or disciplinary action under relevant University procedures including, but not limited to, [grievance](#) and [disciplinary procedures](#). (Please see section below on 'Complaints and Breaches' for further information.)

Use of social media is subject to all current University Policies, including the [Code of Conduct](#) for staff, the [University's Computer Resources](#) - Acceptable Use Policy and other Security Policies, the [JANET Acceptable Use Policy](#), the [Equality and Diversity Policy](#), [Trans Equality Policy](#) and [Bullying and Harassment Policy](#).

If you are not sure which policies are appropriate to your needs or area, please click [here](#) to find out more and contact a member of the team.

2.4 Institutional Context and Vision Statement

The University's Vision is to be:

“A world-class international university that supports outstanding students and staff, working in world-class facilities, conducting leading-edge education and research, focused on the needs of society.”

The University holds five Core Values that express our shared understanding of what we believe, how we aim to behave and what we aspire to be as an international organisation. Our Core Values are:

1. Integrity
2. Connected
3. Ambition
4. Respect
5. Excellence

This Policy seeks to support and align with the University's corporate objectives and these Core Values.

3. Roles and Responsibilities (University-Affiliated Accounts)

3.1 Strategic Marketing and Communications will:

- Stay abreast of the latest digital developments which could assist the University in achieving its strategic objectives.
- Consult on strategic social media activity across the University and signpost staff to the appropriate social media lead in their area, such as their Faculty Digital Marketing Officer.
- Maintain the University's [Social Media Directory](#).

- Audit the University's social media output and provide appropriate support to ensure all accounts are performing to their full potential.
- Monitor the use of social media activity across the University to ensure it is carried out in line with this Policy.

3.2 University staff should:

Feel confident in the appropriate use of social media and, to that end, have a working knowledge of this Policy, ensuring any social media activity they are responsible for that is directly related to the University, is carried out in line with the University's guidelines. If there are any doubts as to the use of social media and compliance with your obligations under the Policy, you should raise these with your line manager and the Social Media Manager before engaging in the social media activity.

Accounts affiliated with the University must not use social media to engage in any of the following activities. Please note that this list is not exhaustive:

- To post inappropriate, discriminatory or defamatory comments, including comments about colleagues, students or support staff.
- To bully, harass or intimidate students, colleagues or any other person.
- To breach the University's data protection, internet, email and communications, information security and/or whistleblowing policies.
- To post threatening, obscene or profane comments.
- To express or support sexist, racist, sectarian, homophobic or transphobic views.
- To express support for illegal activities or organisations.

- To disseminate misleading information.
- To share confidential or sensitive/commercially sensitive information.
- To view or distribute sexually explicit or offensive content.
- To infringe or violate someone else's rights.
- To post personally identifiable information that could be used to locate any individual without that person's written permission.
- To make defamatory or disparaging statements about the University, its employees, students or any other individual or entity affiliated or associated with the University in any way.
- To post content that could create a security risk for the University, its staff or students.
- To knowingly post, upload, forward or post a link to chain mail or junk mail.
- To post, upload, forward or post a link to offensive or inappropriate jokes or offensive or inappropriate images (including those aimed at or related to any protected characteristic or groups under the University's [Equality and Diversity Policy](#)) or gossip.
- To act in any way which may be unlawful.

3.2.1 Account Creation and Administration

University staff should:

- Follow the account creation process set out in this Policy.
- Clearly state the remit of the account within the account About/Bio section and include a statement that engaging with content does not equate to

endorsement.

- Adhere to the following naming format. The reason for this is to help users find the account in the platform's search bar. 'QUB' sets us apart from other entities also using *Queen's* in their name and draws the brand together.
 - Twitter/Instagram/Snapchat naming format:
 - @QUB (Account area or service)
 - For example:
@QUBAlumni
@QUBEQualDiverse
@QUBEngagement
@QUBManagement
 - Other Platforms (for example, Facebook and LinkedIn Showcase):
 - QUB (Account area or service)
 - For example, QUB School of Electronics, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science.
 - Where the name does not work with 'QUB' at the start (except Twitter, Snapchat and Instagram), QUB should be placed at the end of the name.
 - For example, The Graduate School at QUB
- Use the appropriate training opportunities which the University provides in order to ensure social media safeguarding and skills remain at an appropriate level.
- Ensure content is accurate, frequently updated and regularly monitored.
- Contact your line manager and the University's Social Media Manager as soon as possible if an account's security is compromised, or if any crises should arise.

- Transfer administration of University accounts to named colleagues when leaving a role as an account administrator. The account password must also be changed by the new administrators when the account is transferred to them. Further access to the account must not be granted.
- Ensure the University is aware of the change of ownership. Two weeks before a staff member leaves their role as an account admin, their line manager and second admin are responsible for informing the University of the change. This should be communicated to the University's Social Media Manager via socialmedia@qub.ac.uk and, where appropriate, the Faculty Digital Marketing Officer. This should detail the name of the staff member, their email address, accounts they have access to and the details of the new/interim staff member who will be managing the account in their place.

3.3 Security and Reputation (University-Affiliated Accounts)

Account administrators must ensure the security of their accounts.

Accounts affiliated with the University must not be used in a way that breaches this Policy or the given platform's Terms and Conditions.

Where a breach of this Policy is identified, the individual must report the issue as soon as possible to their line manager and the University's Social Media Manager within Strategic Marketing and Communications.

Any issues relating to a School or Faculty must be shared with the Faculty Digital Marketing Officer who will advise the account administrator on procedure and inform the University's Social Media Manager.

4. Equality and Diversity (University Affiliated Accounts)

The University is committed to:

- Promoting equality of opportunity and respecting and celebrating the cultural diversity within the University.
- Promoting a good and harmonious environment free from flags, emblems, posters, graffiti or other material or actions or language likely or perceived to be provocative, offensive or intimidating.
- Fulfilling its legal obligations under the equality legislation and associated codes of practice.
- Taking lawful affirmative and positive action, where appropriate.

As such, all social media activity must comply with the University's [Equality and Diversity Policy](#) and users must not use social media to engage in any activity which could reasonably be considered as negative, derogatory or offensive in terms of people's gender, including gender re-assignment, marital or civil partnership status, having or not having dependants, religious belief or political opinion, race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, including Irish Travellers), disability, sexual orientation, and age. In all cases, social media activity should not be in breach of the aims of the Equality and Diversity Policy.

Please click here to read the University's [Equality and Diversity Policy](#) and [Bullying and Harassment Complaints Procedure](#). Any failure to follow this Policy may lead to investigations and/or further appropriate action, which in serious cases, as determined by the University, could lead to disciplinary action.

In order to support Section 75 protected categories, the University will support key themes/events as detailed in Appendix 1. This appendix will be reviewed yearly and updated as necessary.

In order to uphold this commitment to equality and diversity, it is best practice to include a link to the [University's Social Media House Rules](#) within the description of social media

accounts and make followers aware that they are in place for their wellbeing.

This Policy, and these House Rules are designed to ensure that social media users/followers have a positive experience and all official University accounts remain a safe place for them to engage with topics of interest.

If a social media user/follower breaches the Social Media House Rules when interacting with a University-affiliated account, the administrator should follow these steps:

1. Explain to the individual that they are acting in a way that goes against the ethos of the account and warn them that further breaches will result in them being banned from the account.
2. Copy the link to the post deemed to be in breach and, if the feature is available on the platform, hide the comment/content. You may also need to contact the platform on which the account is hosted. If such a situation arises, please refer to the Social Media Manager.
3. If the individual continues to act in a negative way, they should be banned from the account without further correspondence.
4. If the individual's actions require legal or police intervention, please copy the link to the post and raise the issue with your line manager and the University's Social Media Manager.

5. Representation (University-Affiliated Accounts)

Remember, when posting on behalf of the University, social media users will view the content as coming from the University, rather than a person. Therefore, all posts, comments and messages must be factually correct, appropriate and in line with University guidelines.

All accounts must make it clear that sharing of content does not mean the University endorses the views expressed within the post or any link associated with it.

6. Account Creation and Management (University-Affiliated Accounts)

Before any Queen's-affiliated account is created, the prospective administrators should consider:

1. The purpose of the account.
2. The target audience.
3. Choice of platforms.
4. Time available to devote to the account.
5. Content to be posted on the account.
6. Issues, challenges or risks likely to arise as a result of topic/content.
7. Identity of two official administrators of the account.

Once you have considered these issues, complete the request form [here](#). A member of the Social Media Team will progress your request, advise on best practice, offer strategic guidance and, where appropriate, put you in contact with the digital lead in your Faculty or area.

All University accounts must be linked to University email accounts, rather than personal email accounts. Where platform administrators are required to have a personal account on the platform (for example, Facebook), a new 'personal' account should be created that is only used for this purpose. This will be created with your staff email address and can be named: (Your First Name) and 'Belfast', or similar, for example, 'Emma Belfast'. This personal account will only be used as a way to set up and manage the official account.

6.1 Statement of Affiliation

All Queen's-affiliated accounts must clearly state that they are official accounts and that the sharing of content does not equate to endorsement.

Twitter Example: Official account of *(Insert School/Department here)* @QUBelfast. Likes, RTs or posting of content/links does not equate to endorsement. House Rules: *(insert link here)*

Facebook Example: Official account of *(Insert School/Department here)* @QUBelfast. Likes, shares or posting of content or links does not equate to endorsement. House Rules: *(insert link here)*

6.2 Posting

When it comes to posting, if in doubt, don't.

The assumption should be that everything posted online is public and permanent, regardless of the privacy settings applied to your group, profile or page. The University considers all social media activity as public.

Social media content can easily become available to the public, including the University, students and the media. Inappropriate use could damage reputation. Where the University considers that activity has or could potentially damage reputation, it may take appropriate action according to the individual's employment status and/or contractual terms.

It is also important to read and understand the terms and conditions of any social media site which you use and note that many social media platforms specify that, by posting on their sites, the company is granted irrevocable, perpetual, non-exclusive license to use and distribute content for any purpose, commercial, advertising, or otherwise.

6.3 Accuracy

Checking the accuracy of your posts, comments and replies is key. Anyone posting on behalf of the University is responsible for the content within their output, be this by public post, closed group or private message.

It is better to take a little longer to check the information than to post it quickly, have to remove it and potentially post a retraction after it has been in the public domain.

6.4 Brand Guidelines

To support the wider University, it is important that all activity adheres to the University's brand guidelines.

Please click [here](#) to download your copy.

6.5 Intellectual Property and Copyright

One of the most engaging aspects of social media is the ability to share posts from other accounts. While this is encouraged, it is important to be aware of the distinction between a share/retweet and creating a new post/tweet.

When you share/retweet another account's post/tweet you may not be breaking IP or copyright, but it is important that you consider the terms and conditions of any platform or account. However, if you create a new post/tweet, taking content that is not yours, and you do so without permission of the individual and/or the platform or account, you could be in breach of IP rights and/or copyright law.

It is important that staff do not breach copyright laws by using someone else's images, videos, music or written content without appropriate permission.

Once permission is gained, be mindful of any clauses for use, such as attributing the source or requirement to refrain from using it in a sales capacity.

6.6 Photography

When taking photographs for use on social media, it is important to ensure you have the appropriate permissions for the location and from the individuals within the image, or their parent/guardian.

Please contact [Strategic Marketing and Communications](#) to request the relevant consent forms and advice regarding the appropriate process.

6.7 Reasonable Adjustment for Disability

Those staff required to use social media as part of their role will be assessed to locate reasonable adjustments to ensure accessibility.

The audience's accessibility will be protected by subtitling videos and including image descriptions for audio readers, where reasonable, possible and appropriate.

6.8 Data Protection

All storage and processing of personal information must adhere to the Data Protection Act 2018 and the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (together with 'Data Protection Legislation').

All use of social media should be in compliance with Data Protection Legislation and not in breach of the University's [Data Protection Policy](#), which should be read in conjunction with this Policy.

If disclosing personal information, other than your own, consider whether the disclosure is necessary, proportionate and/or would be expected. Please contact the [Information Compliance Unit](#) for advice prior to posting if you are unsure as to the lawfulness of disclosure.

For a copy of the University's Data Protection Policy, and further information, please consult the [Information Compliance Unit](#) webpages.

It is vitally important that security of all accounts is assured and unauthorised access to personal data held on an official University social media account is not purposely or accidentally granted.

To find out more about how to ensure accounts follow current legislation, please contact the University's [Information Compliance Unit](#).

If for any reason data protection is breached, please contact the University's Social Media Manager and Information Compliance Unit straight away.

6.9 Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk

The University takes the safety of children and adults at risk extremely seriously. This includes their online safety. All those who use social media for, or on behalf of, the University must read and comply with the University's eSafety Guidance.

Please contact the [Legal Services Unit](#) if you have any questions or concerns regarding implementation of this guidance.

Failure to comply may result in investigation under the relevant University procedure, for example, Disciplinary Procedure or Conduct Regulations.

6.10 Confidentiality

Confidential University information must not be shared on social media. This includes, but is not limited to, sensitive University information, personal details or data of staff or students, official contracts, business strategies or content of confidential meetings, correspondence or calls.

If such content is shared, please take a screenshot and remove the content from the platform. Please make your line manager, the University's Social Media Manager and [Legal Services Unit](#) aware of the situation straight away.

7. Personal Accounts

The University is committed to fostering Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom.

Many staff use social media in a personal capacity. While this may not be directly related to the institution, it can have a negative impact on the University by association.

The University is committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of staff and providing any support necessary. If members of staff are subjected to bullying or harassment via social media, particularly if it relates in any way to their role at the University, they should inform their line manager and/or the [Staff Wellbeing Team](#) in People and Culture and appropriate support will be provided.

The University does not and will not monitor individuals' accounts. However, if a concern is raised regarding content posted on a staff member's social media account and the post is considered to be misconduct (as defined in the relevant [University Policies](#)), the University has the right to request the removal of content. In addition, the matter may be addressed through the relevant University Procedure.

Staff may use their personal social media accounts to differ from the University's position as long as it is done in a way that reflects the University's five Core Values (outlined in Section 2.4).

Social media activity by members of staff should not:

- Bring, or have the potential to bring, Queen's University Belfast or its values, images and members into disrepute.
- Do anything that could be viewed as direct or indirect discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation.
- Engage in, or support, illegal activity.
- Breach confidentiality.
- Breach copyright.

- Breach data protection.

When using a personal social media account, staff are strongly advised to include (where appropriate) a disclaimer stating that the views expressed are theirs alone and engaging with, or sharing of, content does not equate to endorsement. This is particularly relevant if the account states that a staff member is affiliated with the University, either in the name or description. In this instance, it is advised that the disclaimer states that the views expressed do not reflect the views of the University and that engaging with, or sharing of, content does not equate to endorsement.

University-branded artwork must not be amended for inappropriate use on social media. It must also not be used in personal account avatars or personal account cover images, unless it is part of a University-wide initiative or campaign.

8. Training

It is strongly recommended that all users remain up to date with best practice through regular training.

The IT Training and Assessment Unit and Strategic Marketing and Communications provide various training courses in social media which can be booked via [iTrent](#).

9. Complaints and Breaches

This important Policy is intended to support staff in the appropriate use of social media. If a member of staff is alleged to have not complied with this Policy, this may result in investigation under the relevant University Policy or procedure, which may lead to a sanction, including termination of contract, according to the individual's contractual terms. The University may also withdraw the staff member's access to social media platforms via its systems.

If a member of staff creates or shares content on a social media platform, this may still amount to a breach of this Policy even if it takes place:

- on a personal account with appropriate privacy settings;
- outside normal working hours; and/or
- without using the University's computer, systems and networks.

As outlined above, there may be instances where failure to comply with this Policy constitutes a criminal offence and may result in the University having to report this to the police, which could lead to prosecution of the individual.

The University reserves the right to act on any complaints or information obtained from online sources if it indicates that a member of staff is in breach of the University's policies such as the Code of Conduct.

The Code of Conduct for staff can be found [here](#).

10. Auditing

The University reserves the right to regularly audit University-affiliated or related accounts. Where an account is found to be in breach of University policies/guidelines, Queen's Social Media Manager, or the appropriate Faculty Digital Marketing Officer, will contact the administrator to provide support and request action, where necessary.

This may include:

- Removal/editing of posts.
- Removal/editing of accounts.
- Supplying names of current account administrators.
- Supplying information regarding platform activity/campaigns.
- Access to the account as an account administrator.

If the administrator is not known to the University, contact will be made via the account. Any account that refuses to comply

with a legitimate request of compliance may have an official complaint lodged with the platform and face appropriate legal action.

11. Appropriation

The University reserves the right to request the removal of content which infringes on the University's copyright, or implies an unauthorised association (for example, references to Queen's University Belfast or QUB, the University's official brand assets and related imagery, or accounts which misleadingly purport to be an official University social media account) or in any other way is deemed by the University to be in breach of this Policy or any related policy.

12. Review

This Policy is kept under review and updated periodically to reflect developments in social media and the implementation of the University's strategic priorities and position.

13. Formats

If you require this Policy in any other format, please contact [Strategic Marketing and Communications](#).

14. Section 75

This Policy has been screened out with mitigation as per Equality Commission guidance on screening, with no adverse impact with regard to equality of opportunity and/or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

Appendix 1: Section 75 Protected Areas Activity

	Ethnic Origin	Disability	Ethnic Origin	Religious Belief	Gender	Dependants	Sexual Orientation	Ethnic Origin	Age
Agreed Area of Support	Thanksgiving	International Day of Persons with Disabilities	Chinese New Year	Holi Hindu Festival of Colours	International Women's Day	Carers' Week	Belfast Pride	Belfast Mela Celebrating Diversity	International Day of Older Persons
Month	November	December	January/February	March	March	June	August	August	October
Activity	Posting via appropriate social media platforms.								

