

Lancaster University Students' Union Social Media Policy

Social networks like Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and YouTube and blogging platforms available online are useful tools for the students' union to promote its work. They have also become an integral part of our personal lives, allowing us to share our thoughts and ideas with others.

However, use of social media platforms presents risks for the students' union. This document sets out clear boundaries and principles that should be met when using social media as a staff member, officer, trustee or volunteer of the union, in a way that ensures that material published complies with laws surrounding the union's status as a charity.

For the purposes of this document references to 'the union', 'students' union' and 'Lancaster University Students' Union', will encompass all areas of the students' union including (but not restricted to), clubs, societies, college executives and sub-committees.

Background

Principles behind the students' union's social media policy are derived from three principal sources:

- The Charities Act 2011
- The Lobbying Act 2014 (Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014)
- Lancaster University Students' Union policies and procedures

The overarching principles behind the policy are:

- Lancaster University Students' Union can only campaign on issues that fit in with its objectives as an educational charity – matters which affect 'students as students'. See Section 3
- Under no circumstances may staff, full-time officers, cross-campus officers, sub-committee officers or trustees endorse or oppose political parties or candidates from accounts associated with the students' union. See Section 2
- Social media communications that are in any way associated with the students' union must adhere to our ethos, as outlined in the constitution, byelaws and other union policy.

1.0 Official students' union accounts

1.1 Lancaster University Students' Union has a number of official social media presences, including (but not limited to) the @LancasterSU Twitter account, official Twitter accounts for all of the full-time officers and Facebook pages for the students' union, Purple and The Sugarhouse. Passwords for these accounts are held centrally by the IT Department. Email addresses and passwords for these accounts must not be changed without the authorisation of the Communications Team.

1.2 Breaches of charity, electoral or media law or the students' union's internal policies could have serious consequences for the organisation. Therefore the Communications Team reserves the right to suspend access of any staff member or officer found to have published inappropriate material.

1.3 The Communications Team can offer guidance if there is any doubt about content you are considering publishing via official social media profiles.

1.4 Union-related social media accounts should only be set up by and at the discretion of the Communications Team. This is to ensure that any new account which is set up fits the overall communications strategy and students' union branding guidelines.

2.0 Personal political affiliation and campaigning

2.1 It is essential that students' union staff and officers who wish to voice their political opinions or discuss issues that go beyond our remit as a charity draw a distinction between their personal and professional social media presences. Although people who work as part of the union are free to get involved in politics in a private capacity, they must ensure that this is done in a way that is not associated with their work. Adding a disclaimer such as 'views my own' to a social media profile is not a valid defence.

2.2 Therefore, social media accounts that have been created for union purposes including, clubs, societies, college executives and sub-committees must not contain content of a party-political nature. Political campaigning is not limited to discussion of specific parties – endorsing policies that are identified with a specific political party is also prohibited.

2.3 Personal social media accounts which are used to publish party-political content (including discussion of policies that are associated with specific candidates or parties) must make no reference to the owner's involvement with the students' union.

2.4 Distributing political content from personal to professional accounts (via retweets, Facebook shares etc) is also prohibited.

2.5 Content published from professional/official accounts must avoid using hashtags, images or any other content associated with specific political parties.

2.6 In common with the rest of the union, our student media teams are required to avoid specifically endorsing political parties or candidates. The union's educational remit means that student media teams can discuss any issue as long as all sides of a debate are represented. If student media volunteers hold their own social media accounts relating to specific political causes, no association may be made between those accounts and their published student media content.

3.0 Using social media for students' union business purposes

3.1 No one is obliged to use their personal accounts to conduct union business however many staff, officers and volunteers do choose to do so. If an individual does not wish to be contacted via social media for work purposes this should be respected and alternative methods such as university email should be used.

(Career Staff)

3.2 *Career* Staff must not comment on social media sites with regard to students' union's policies or elections.

3.3 If career staff accept students as friends on social networks, staff and officers should be mindful of posting information that could reflect negatively on them personally or professionally.

(All)

3.4 If an account (personal, professional or collective) can be identified as being part of the students' union on a social networking site, their online presence reflects on the organisation and the account will be considered to be associated with the union. Staff, officers and volunteers should be aware that their actions captured via images, posts, or comments can reflect on the union. They should also be aware of photographs they are tagged in and posts that other members might make about them or on their accounts.

3.6 Some people (particularly officers) may wish to use social media to engage in debate or discussion about issues relevant to our work. This is acceptable, provided that an appropriate tone is adopted. Robust debate is encouraged; rudeness, abuse and bullying are unacceptable.

3.7 If you choose to use groups such as Facebook Groups or group chats of any kind to conduct union business (this includes staff to staff and staff to student communication) appropriate tone and etiquette is expected of all members. All parties should also be considerate of business hours particularly in groups used to conduct business between career staff/full-time Officers and students.

4.0 General good practice

4.1 Ensure any information published on social media sites should be in the public domain – don't reveal confidential information or future developments or pre-empt an announcement. This applies to both personal and official profiles.

4.2 Do not publish anonymously or use pseudonyms/false screen names when publishing online on behalf of the students' union; we strive to be as transparent an organisation as possible. Use your real name, be clear who you are, and identify that you work for the students' union. Write in the first person and avoid saying anything that is dishonest, untrue, or misleading.

4.3 Sites such as LinkedIn provide the opportunity to write recommendations or referrals for colleagues and former colleagues. This could give the impression that the students' union endorses the individual being recommended and could create a liability situation if another company recruits the person on the basis of the recommendation. As such if writing such a recommendation staff should state that it is their personal view and they are not representing the view of the students' union.

4.4 If you make an error, be up front about your mistake and correct it quickly. If you choose to modify an earlier post, make it clear that you have done so. If someone accuses you of posting something improper (such as their copyrighted material or a defamatory comment about them), deal with it quickly - better to remove it immediately to lessen the possibility of further action. The Communications Manager can offer advice on media law.

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