

**LANCASTER UNIVERSITY  
STUDENTS' UNION**

# Lancaster University Students Union

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Acceptable use of Social Media Policy  
June 2019

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# 1. Introduction

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Lancaster University Students' Union (the Union) as a registered charity is committed to ensuring that a safe and supportive environment exists for all Trustees, staff/officers, volunteers, students and visitors to the Union. The work of the Union may include children, young people or adults whose involvement and input to the Union is welcomed, encouraged and appreciated.

The Union encourage an open culture in all its dealings with Trustees, staff, officers, volunteers and all the people with whom we come into contact. Effective and honest communication is essential if malpractice is to be effectively dealt with.

Social media channels provide important and exciting opportunities for the Union and its constituent parts to communicate and engage with a wide range of audiences and stakeholders. These channels also provide a range of professional and personal opportunities for Trustees, staff, officers, volunteers and students.

However, there are also a number of risks associated with the use of social media which could ultimately impact on the Union's reputation.

The principles behind this 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'
- 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
- 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.

## 2. Purpose of the Policy

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This policy is intended to support and protect Trustees, Staff, Officers, volunteers and students in their use of social media including making them aware of the possible risks which may arise from the inappropriate, irresponsible or careless use of social media.

It is intended to provide guidance to Trustees, Staff, Officers, volunteers and students to assist them in making the best use of social media in order to enhance their personal, professional and academic lives and in particular students' experience as a whole. It is also intended to make Trustees, Staff, Officers, volunteers and students aware of the potential consequences of the misuse of social media, both as someone who works for or is associated/affiliated with the Union and in their personal lives.

This policy provides Trustees, Staff, Officers, volunteers and students with information on the Union requirements and expectations in relation to the use of social media in order to:

- Ensure a consistent approach to social media across the organisation and its affiliated groups
- Set out the legal risks associated with social media use
- Ensure Trustees, Staff, Officers, volunteers and students do not compromise their personal security or the security of the Union information assets
- Set out the responsibilities of users of the Union social media accounts
- Support users of the Union social media accounts to mitigate the risks associated with social media, protecting themselves as well as the Union
- Clarify the expectations of Trustees, Staff, Officers, volunteers and students using social media in an individual professional or personal capacity
- Outline channels for escalation of issues or concerns
- Signpost Trustees, Staff, Officers, volunteers and students to resources which will support them in enhancing their social media presence and that of the Union

## 3. Definitions

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Social media are websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Examples of popular social media sites include, but are not limited to:

- LinkedIn
- Twitter

- Facebook
- YouTube
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Flickr
- Yammer
- Yahoo/MSN messenger
- Wikis and blogs
- Weibo
- WeChat
- WhatsApp

A corporate social media account is any account run by the Union or affiliated group or other function which sits within the work of the Union.

## 4. Legal Implications and Risks

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There are a number of pieces of legislation relevant to the use of social media and these are listed in Appendix A. Trustees, Staff, Officers, volunteers and students using social media should be mindful of the following legal risks and acts in particular:

- **Defamation:** posting untrue content adversely affecting a person's or organisation's reputation, which has caused, or is likely to cause, harm
- **Malicious falsehood:** posting untrue and damaging content with an improper motive, resulting in financial loss for the subject
- **Harassment:** subjecting someone to a course of conduct that causes them distress or alarm, including stalking, trolling and cyber-bullying
- **Intellectual property infringement:** posting content which copies a substantial part of a work protected by copyright
- **Breach of confidence:** posting confidential information. Trustees, Staff, Officers, volunteers and students must also familiarise themselves with the confidentiality rules of the Union.
- **Malicious Communications Act 1988:** prevents conveying a threat, a grossly offensive or indecent message or false information with the intention to cause distress or anxiety to the reader or recipient.
- **Section 127, Communications Act 2003:** prevents the use of public electronic communications equipment to send a message that is false, grossly offensive, or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character, whether received by the intended recipient or not.
- **Computer Misuse Act 1990:** prevents the unauthorised access, modification and use of computer material or the use of a computer to assist in a criminal

offence, including accessing confidential information and thereby impersonating another person through social media.

- **Prevent Duty Guidance (from Section 26(1) of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015):** requires the Union to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.
- **The Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 146 of the Equality Act 2010):** requires the Union to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, including bullying, harassment and victimisation; to promote equality of opportunity between different groups; and to foster good relations between different groups.

## 5. Official Lancaster University Students' Union Social Media Accounts

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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 fulltime officers
- @LancasterSU Instagram account
- Facebook pages for the students' union, Purple and The Sugarhouse

An up to date list of social media accounts can be found in the Union Social media directory, found here: <https://lancastersu.co.uk/socialmedia>

Passwords for these accounts are held centrally by the Communications Team. Email addresses and passwords for these accounts must not be changed without the authorisation of the Communications Team.

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.

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

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.

## **6. Personal Political Affiliation and Campaigning**

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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.

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.

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.

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

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

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.

## **7. Using Social Media for Official Students' Union Business Purposes**

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No one is obliged to use their personal accounts to conduct union business however many Trustees, 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.

### **All Trustees, Staff, Officers and Volunteers**

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.

Trustees, 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.

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.

If you choose to use groups such as Facebook Groups, WhatsApp, or group chats of any other 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.

### **Career Staff**

Career Staff must not comment on social media sites with regard to students' union's policies, elections, or political activity. Staff should take care in commenting on any Students' Union activity, recognising that any such comments could be misconstrued, taken out of context or used beyond the initial intention.

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.

### **Student Groups (including Clubs, Societies and Student Media)**

For the avoidance of doubt all Student Media volunteers, Club and Society members are subject to this policy in their official capacity. In particular;

- Members of Student Media teams must undertake media law training before embarking on the activity, with this participation recorded.
- If a concern is raised to the Students Union regarding content posted on an affiliated student account, the Students Union may review breach of any policies contained herein, under the Code of Conduct. In addition, the matter may be referred to the University Disciplinary procedure.

## **8. General Good Practice**

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### **Personal Safety**

Don't reveal information about you that could be used to steal your identity (e.g. date and place of birth), or that might reveal your actual whereabouts. Never share your passwords or log-on information with anyone, ever. ***Thoroughly check privacy settings and consider how much information you are sharing.***

### **Emergency situations**

If staff, trustees, officers or volunteers identify content which could be deemed an emergency, they should make the Union aware of this immediately, via the emergency out of hours number 07498 780238

For clarity, the Union would identify the following as a (non-exclusive) list of emergency situations;

- Content which is attracting attention of Local regional, national or international press on any platform.
- Content which is personally upsetting, or which can be identified as potentially upsetting to another.
- Content on Union platforms which could be construed as breaching this or other Union policies and procedures.
- Content which indicates immediate risk to a person related to the Union, whether through a group or activity.
- Any indication of a crime or emergency (secondary to reporting the incident/ activity to the emergency services)

The Union has a process by which professional support is provided, regardless of the availability of the Comms team. Should the comms team be unavailable, you should contact the Head of Marketing and Organisational Development who will signpost you.

### **Engaging with “the Press”**

If you are contacted by press agencies/ journalists through your social media accounts regarding any specific or general issue, we advise you do not immediately engage in dialogue, and immediately contact the Union comms team ([help@lancastersu.co.uk](mailto:help@lancastersu.co.uk)) for support.

### **Consider the Implications Before Posting**

- Social media is not anonymous, and the internet remembers everything. Postings of all types can typically be traced back to their authors, and information posted through social media is backed up, stored, replicated, linked and reposted continuously.
- 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- Think carefully about posting anything which you would not want a third party such as a future employer, institution or professional body to read or which you would not feel comfortable seeing on the front page of a newspaper or the BBC website, or which you would not wish to be heard saying in public.
- 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.
- If you are on a course that leads to professional accreditation, make sure you also familiarise yourself also with the relevant professional standards regarding the use of social media.
- You should be respectful of and protect the privacy of others. Don't post or share photographs, content or other information if you do not have permission to do so. You need to consider intellectual property rights, copyright and ownership of data when using social media.
- Inappropriate or inaccurate comments which are damaging to a person's reputation should be avoided as they could result in a claim for defamation, for which you could be personally responsible.

- Bullying remains bullying even if it is not conducted in a public sphere. The same is true for cyber-bullying.

### **Be Respectful**

- As a Trustee, employee, volunteer or member of the Union, you are bound by the Union's Code of Conduct.
- Comments and other postings made or facilitated by you on social media may also reflect on the Union and you should therefore when using social media remain mindful of avoiding communications that would or could defame the Union or its Trustees, staff, officers, volunteers, students or otherwise damage the reputation of the Union.
- It is also important to consider the possible effect that you may have on the recipient(s) of your postings on social media, as well as thinking about the wider audience who may also see your posting.
- In particular, you should avoid making, posting, or facilitating statements, photos or videos that:
  - a) Discriminate against a person based on his or her race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or beliefs or national origin
  - b) threaten, harass, intimidate, abuse, bully or victimise
  - c) make sexual innuendos
  - d) are offensive, false, inaccurate or unjustified
  - e) may cause undue distress or provoke anti-social or violent behaviour
  - f) contravene any codes of conduct or standards relevant to your course at the university or any placement forming part of your programme of study
  - g) constitute a criminal offence
  - h) may breach The Union and/or the university's policies

This is not an exhaustive list, but merely examples of what may constitute a breach of the rules of the Code of Conduct in certain circumstances.

Lancaster University Students' Union logo and branding may only be used with the express permission of the organisation. You should contact the Communications Department- [help@lancastersu.co.uk](mailto:help@lancastersu.co.uk) for more details.

### **Photographs**

The Union specifically recognises the sensitivity and prevalence of potential issues with publication/ distribution of photographic images. As such the Union has a specific and comprehensive social media photo editorial policy, which must be followed without fail (Appendix B)

### **Electronic devices**

We recommend auto-population is not selected for access to any social media account on desktop devices.

Where Trustees, staff, Officers or volunteers are accessing official Union accounts on mobile devices, you must ensure a suitable screen lock is enabled to prevent unauthorised access. You should also secure accounts with 2-factor authentication. Where Trustees, staff, Officers or volunteers are required to provide social media coverage for Union events, they should access the Union owned devices (requested through the Comms team).

## Appendix A

### Legislation

Relevant legislation includes:

- Obscene Publications Act 1959 and 1964
- Protection of Children Act 1978
- Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984
- Education (No. 2) Act 1986 (Freedom of Speech)
- Education Act 1986;
- Public Order Act 1986 (as amended by the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2007)
- Education Reform Act 1988 (Academic Freedom)
- Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988
- Malicious Communications Act 1988
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Computer Misuse Act 1990
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
- Communications Act 2003
- Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005
- Police and Justice Act 2006
- Terrorism Act 2006
- Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008
- Equality Act 2010
- Defamation Act 2013
- Data Retention Investigatory Powers Act 2014
- Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (Prevent)
- Data Protection Act 2018

## APPENDIX B

### Social Media Photo Editorial Policy – November 2018

The following policy is to ensure that material published via the social media channels is aligned with the charitable values of Lancaster University Students' Union.

- **All images published via social media channels must avoid featuring students who are visibly intoxicated**  
If a photographer working in the venue suspects that someone they have photographed is intoxicated, this must be raised with a member of security staff at the first opportunity
- **All images published via social media channels must avoid featuring students who are inappropriately dressed**  
Appropriate attire is a matter of judgement but clothing deemed unacceptable may include (but is not limited to) fancy dress costumes portraying stereotypes or vilified historical figures/fictional characters, or items featuring offensive words, slogans or images either by design or through customisation.  
In the event that a photographer observes grossly offensive clothing, a member of security staff should be alerted immediately
- **Where freelance photographers are employed, they should not be given direct access to publish content on social media pages**  
Content should be reviewed and published only by a Sugarhouse venue manager or (if unavailable) the students' union Communications Manager or Communications Assistant
- **In the event that Sugarhouse or Communications Team staff become aware of inappropriate attire being worn in the venue, the union Complaints Manager Chris Cottam ([c.cottam1@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:c.cottam1@lancaster.ac.uk)) should be alerted and any relevant images retained for evidential purposes**