SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE
INTRODUCTION

1. The University recognises the benefits and opportunities presented by social media. Our employees are encouraged to use social media across research, education and professional networking. When doing so, it is important that employees behave responsibly, respectfully, and with due regard to the values we share as a community.

2. This guidance applies to all employees and outlines the need to establish professional boundaries, respect confidentiality and protect personal wellbeing when using any social media. A range of support is available to our staff to support them to use social media effectively. It is important to note that all of our policies and guidance apply online as they do in all other areas.

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

3. Social media are defined as any online communication generally encouraging participation and exchange. Common social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Instagram. This guidance also covers email networks and communication tools that are used internally at the University (this includes external platforms, such as WhatsApp).

4. The audience for information exchanged using social media can be unrestricted and unknown, and it is important to remember that communication in closed or restricted groups might be shared more widely. Audiences, intentional or otherwise, might include colleagues at the University, potential, current or past students, peers in other institutions, research or business partners, and members of the public.
USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

5. Our dual commitment to academic freedom and inclusion underpins our expectations of how our employees engage with social media. Freedom of speech is an essential part of academic and University life and flourishes where there is tolerance of, and respect for, a wide range of views and beliefs. However, our commitment to inclusion demands that we exercise our freedoms responsibly, respectfully and with due regard to the values we share as a community.

6. In using social media, whether personal accounts or on official University media channels, it is important that employees exercise their freedom responsibly and in line with the University’s values. Employees should behave as professionally as they would in the workplace. Particular care should be taken when interacting with students or prospective students online. Employees must remember that when they post on social media, it might be interpreted as representing or speaking on behalf of the University, whether intended or not.

7. Employees must not engage in any activity that could be described as harassment, bullying or hate crime – as set out and defined in Our Zero Tolerance Approach to Harassment and Bullying. Publication or sharing of any material or comments which are illegal, defamatory, offensive, or damaging to the reputation of the University will lead to investigation and action under the Disciplinary Procedure and could potentially lead to the involvement of the police.

8. The Whistleblowing Policy sets out how employees can raise serious concerns that are in the public interest. Individuals who make disclosures under the terms of the policy will be protected and supported.

9. Existing University policies and guidance apply online as they do offline. Policies and guidance of particular note are:

- Social Media Support
- Zero Tolerance Approach to Harassment and Bullying
- Information Security Policy
- Guidelines for the use of IT facilities
- Intellectual Property Policy
- Other HR policies including the Disciplinary Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
SUPPORT IN USING SOCIAL MEDIA AND ESTABLISHING A DIGITAL PRESENCE

10. There is a range of support available for employees in engaging positively with social media and in establishing and managing a presence in the digital world. This includes social media support to help colleagues make the most of social media, including a course on Moodle. There is also support on establishing a web presence and writing for the web.

ESTABLISHING PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

11. The University respects privacy and understands that employees will use social media in their private lives. It is therefore important to establish private and professional boundaries on social media so far as possible. This can be done in various ways:

- Using different platforms for personal and professional use. For example, Facebook for personal use; Twitter for professional use.
- Having different identities on the same tool.
- By checking and amending privacy settings in each tool.

12. However, it is important to note that posting in a personal capacity or anonymously or using a different identity does not allow individuals to engage in behaviour that would be considered misconduct (as set out in para 7 above). Employees may add a disclaimer explaining that the views expressed are theirs alone and that they do not necessarily reflect the views of their employer. However, if the content of a post is inappropriate, for example, offensive comments about a colleague, a disclaimer would not prevent the University taking action.
PROTECTING YOUR WELL-BEING

13. It is important to take precautions to ensure personal safety and to protect against identity theft. Personal details like home address and phone numbers are best disclosed in private messages to those who are known and trusted.

14. Social media posts can attract inappropriate or offensive comment from others. Sometimes, such comments may be upsetting but not offensive or professionally damaging – the correct response here might be to disengage from any exchange. Where comments are offensive and may constitute ‘trolling’ or harassment, the provider can be asked to remove the post. Offensive comments made on a University account can be taken down immediately. In these cases, advice on removing the content should be sought from CER.

15. Concerns about work-related abuse or threats through social media should be reported to your line manager and through the University’s Health and Safety incident reporting process. The University also has a Zero Tolerance Approach to Harassment and Bullying with a report and support system.

CONFIDENTIALITY

16. The informal nature of social media can lead to individuals revealing information that is not appropriate. For example:

- Personal information about other people, including contact details and pictures, should never be shared without their consent. The Information Security Policy applies to social media activity.

- University business which is confidential or not in the public domain should not be disclosed. If in any doubt, the Head of Department or Section should be consulted.

- Intellectual property must be protected. Although social media can be a useful tool for research and networking, care should be taken to protect research if work is at an early stage. Similarly, the permission of others should be sought before referencing or sharing their work. Some social media platforms may have terms and conditions that give them intellectual property rights to anything posted on the site.