

Durham SU Social Media Policy

Policy Name:	Social Media Policy		
Approval Date:	8 December 2023	To Be Reviewed:	December 2024
Approved By:	Board of Trustees		
Related Policies:	Safeguarding Policy		

REVIEW HISTORY			
Date	Name	Signature	Notes

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY STATEMENT

Social media creates opportunities for Durham SU to share information with our members and generate and engage in interactive discussion with our members and stakeholders, without which we would be unable to reach many of these people. It is essential to Durham SU's work.

Durham SU wants its use of social media to be helpful and low risk. This policy helps to safeguard Durham SU's members and their activities and reputation, the students' union's corporate reputation, and our confidential and proprietary information. This policy balances our competing legal and regulatory obligations in respect of the use of social media.

WHO THIS POLICY APPLIES TO

This policy sets standards for all staff, trustees, volunteers, and partners to use in internal and external communications, in both professional and personal contexts. These individuals will be collectively referred to as 'social media users' in this policy, except for student group volunteers who will be referred to as 'student group social media users'.

This policy applies differently to student group social media users because there are limits to the confidence we can have in the controls we can helpfully and productively put in place or expect student volunteers to comply with. Durham SU will manage the risk of student group social media use differently to that of other social media users, with key controls described in guidance below.

1. Principles

1.1 To guide how we use social media to aid in achieving our charitable objects we will:

- Make sure that all social media content has a purpose and a benefit for Durham SU, Durham SU's members, and accurately reflects Durham SU's agreed position.
- Use social media to answer members questions, help and engage with them and help them engage with each other.
- Recognise the rights and responsibilities we all have as social media users and how we will balance those in our professional and work-related social media use.
- Acknowledge both the value and risk that social media provides to our partnerships, and avoid misuse of social media, causing disruption or limitation to our work.
- Be honest and accurate on social media, understanding this is balanced with the need to be timely, relevant and responsive.

2. Definitions and Scope

- 2.1 We use the CharityComms definition of social media: *Social media is the term given to web-based tools and applications which enable users to create and share content (words, images and video content), and network with each other through the sharing of information, opinions, knowledge and common interests.* Examples of social media include Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn and Instagram.
- 2.2 Staff, trustees and contracted partner social media users will be referred to as 'social media users' while student group volunteers will be referred to as 'student group social media users'.
- 2.3 This policy applies to content posted both from a Durham SU device and a personal device.
- 2.4 This policy applies to the use of social media for both personal (where it can be linked to Durham SU) and business purposes. Before engaging in work related social media activity all staff must read this policy.
- 2.5 Staff remain responsible for any personal social media content they posted prior to employment at Durham SU.
- 2.6 This policy does not form part of an employee's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time. Amendments to this policy will be shared for staff consultation.

3. How Durham SU will use social media

- 3.1 Durham SU will use platforms most appropriate to the purpose and audience of the work and at the time of writing this includes Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, Tik Tok, WhatsApp and Substack. It may also include all other social network sites including blogs, microblogs and posting sites (such as Wikipedia and jobs boards).
- 3.2 Amongst Durham SU's 'official accounts' are accounts set up for individuals to use to raise their profiles within their roles at Durham SU, for example, student Officers. These are run by named individuals with support from the Marketing Team.
- 3.3 Durham SU will from time to time create private groups or host online discussion forums and these will be moderated by a qualified, nominated member of professional staff.
- 3.4 The Marketing Team is responsible for setting up and managing or overseeing the setup and management of Durham SU's social media channels. Only those authorised by the Marketing Manager have access to these accounts and new accounts should only be created with the Marketing Managers agreement and oversight.
- 3.5 Passwords for social media accounts should not be shared other than with the Marketing Team, and should be changed regularly. The benefits of creating 'work' social media accounts for the management of business pages should be balanced against the risk of breaching platform identity guidelines and account deactivation.
- 3.6 Durham SU social media accounts should normally be checked regularly by trained staff Mon-Fri 10:00-16:00. During times when staff are unavailable to monitor (absence, training, public holidays etc.) auto-responses on direct messages should be used. 'Out of office' style posts can also inform followers of absence and when to expect a reply.

- 3.7 At any point the Marketing Manager may require approval to be given before anything can be posted on any SU channels about a particular topic or issue if it is sensitive or uncertain.

4. Guidelines to appropriate conduct for Durham SU staff social media users

- 4.1 Social media users should ensure they reflect Durham SU's values in their content. Our brand guidelines set out our tone of voice that staff should refer to when posting content on Durham SU's social media channels. All social media users are ambassadors for our brand.
- 4.2 Refrain from offering personal opinions via Durham SU's social media accounts, either directly by commenting or indirectly by 'liking', 'sharing' or 'retweeting'. If you are in doubt of Durham SU's position on a particular issue, please speak to a member of senior staff.
- 4.3 Do not set up other social media channels on behalf of Durham SU without speaking to the Marketing Team. This could confuse messaging and brand awareness and lead to members missing out on useful information. By having official social media accounts in place, the Marketing Team can ensure consistency of information and build a strong following.
- 4.4 If a complaint is made on Durham SU's social media channels, social media users should seek advice from the Marketing Manager before responding, or a member of senior staff.
- 4.5 The Marketing Team regularly monitors social media spaces for mentions of Durham SU so we can catch issues early. If there is an issue that could develop or has already developed into a crisis situation, the Marketing Team will follow our PR crisis management plan. If you become aware of any comments online that they think have the potential to escalate into a crisis, whether on Durham SU's media channels or elsewhere, they should speak to the Marketing Manager or a member of senior staff immediately.
- 4.6 Direct Messaging on social media from a Durham SU account should only be used to for the purposes of furthering our work, and the staff member should always include their name and follow the same standards of conduct and professionalism they would use in email.
- 4.7 Groups, such as Facebook Groups or forums should only be created for the purposes of Durham SU's work with permission from the Marketing Manager. They should include guidance on conduct for members and a moderation plan to ensure reasonable oversight.

5. Guidelines and appropriate conduct for staff social media users and student group social media users

- 5.1 Respect copyright and do not alter or use images, logos, music, videos, brand language or other intellectual property of others, or use their content without permission. This includes using Durham University's logo or trademarks, unless this has been agreed upon for a specific purpose, with the prior knowledge and consent of the Marketing Manager. Acknowledgment of source does not count; written permission is required before use.
- 5.2 Always pause and think before posting but, that said, try to respond to comments in a timely manner when a response is appropriate.
- 5.3 Social media users and student group social media users shouldn't post content about members or service users without their permission. If staff are sharing information from members, service users or third-party organisations, this content should be clearly labelled so our audiences know it has not come directly from Durham SU. If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify a person under 18, social media users and/or student group social media users must ensure they have the consent of a parent or guardian before using

them on social media. Durham SU's data protection and information governance policies provide further context. Advice should always be sought from the Marketing Manager.

- 5.4 Always check facts. Don't automatically assume that material is accurate and take reasonable steps where necessary to seek verification; for example, by checking data/statistics and being wary of photo/video manipulation. If you've made a mistake, don't be afraid to admit it.
- 5.5 Don't encourage people to break the law or risk their personal safety or that of others to supply material for social media, such as using unauthorised video footage or students. All relevant rights for usage must be obtained before publishing material.
- 5.6 Durham SU is not a party-political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. We have every right to express views on policy that impacts students, but we can't tell people how to vote. This is particularly important when there's any form of public election. The Chief Executive is the appropriate point of contact for questions about social media use during elections.
- 5.7 Social media users and student group social media users must not harass, victimise or bully people or organisations using social media in any way. Trolling, cyber-bullying or any other form of online abuse, intimidation or harassment will not be tolerated. Activity such as this can have a profoundly damaging and undermining impact on people, adversely affecting them both personally and professionally. Such activities may be considered under [Durham SU's Disciplinary Policy](#) or [Durham SU's student member Code of Conduct](#).
- 5.8 Social media users and student group social media users must both maintain high ethical standards when using social media, specifically avoiding using it in a misleading, malicious or false way (examples include posting offensive material such as pornography or extreme violence, offensive language such as excessive swearing or malicious name-calling, claiming to be someone other than yourself, revealing sensitive or personal information about someone to cause distress or damage).
- 5.9 The responsibility for measures of protection and intervention lies first with the social networking site itself. Different social networking sites offer different models of interventions in different areas. For more information, refer to the guidance available on the social networking site itself, for example, Facebook. However, if a social media user or student group social media user considers that a person/people is/are at risk of harm, they should report this to the Director of Services, who is Durham SU's safeguarding lead, immediately.
 - 5.9.1 Young and vulnerable people face different risks when using social networking sites. They may be at risk of being bullied, publishing sensitive and personal information on their profiles, or from becoming targets for online grooming. Where known, when communicating with young people under 18-years-old via social media, social media users and student group social media users should ensure the online relationship with Durham SU follows the same rules as the offline 'real-life' relationship. You should ensure that young people have been made aware of the risks of communicating and sharing information online, given guidance on security/privacy settings as necessary and that content they're likely to view is appropriate for them. Please refer to Durham SU's [safeguarding policy](#).

6. Durham SU Student Group Social Media Users

- 6.1.1 The principles of this policy apply to student group social media users, who should primarily be guided in application by [Durham SU's member Code of Conduct](#). Guidance points in section 5 above apply to student group social media users as well as staff users.
- 6.1.2 Durham SU will provide training and guidance on using social media responsibly for student groups, developed in consultation with them.
- 6.1.3 Student groups are advised to, where possible, make it clear on their social media handles that they are a group of Durham SU. This is to aid the public in flagging issues or resolving complaints.
- 6.1.4 Student group social media users can resolve complaints about their social media themselves where this is a case of correcting and/or editing something simple. However, where this does not resolve the complaint, or a complaint is more serious or complex the Durham SU ASK team (ask@durhamsu.com) should be notified.

7. Support for Durham SU Staff Social Media Users

- 7.1 Durham SU staff who use social media in their roles will be provided with training to understand their responsibilities. The Marketing team should undertake learning appropriate to their role and the channels they manage, recognising that channels develop and change quickly, and resource will be provided to ensure it is possible for them to do so. Other Durham SU staff members should reflect with our managers if additional training in data protection, libel or other areas as part of their roles is useful. Durham SU can provide this.
- 7.2 Any staff member who feels that they themselves, or someone else, is being subjected to trolling, cyber-bullying or other online abuse should speak to their line manager or, in their absence, a member of senior staff, without delay. Durham SU will support staff who have experienced or who are experiencing online abuse. Support can include practical measures such as ensuring that they understand how to block unwelcome online contact, getting abusive content taken down, contacting the social media platform where their platform rules have been breached and by reporting the matter to the police, where necessary.
- 7.3 Durham SU adopts the 'step away principle'. Staff working with or managing social media will have their manager's support to 'step away' from social media for a period of time if they are experiencing or dealing with content which is abusive, stressful or inappropriate. Staff who step away must confirm this with their manager so responsibilities can be paused or transferred. For the avoidance of doubt: staff don't need anyone's permission to step away from social media, but do have a responsibility to tell the appropriate management lead.

8. Use of personal social media accounts

- 8.1 We recognise that there is the potential for staff's personal social media content to impact on Durham SU. Staff are expected to behave in ways that are consistent with Durham SU's values and policies, both online and in real life. This policy does not intend to inhibit personal use of social media but flags areas in which conflicts might arise and need to be navigated.
- 8.2 Any content published on personal social media could affect how people perceive Durham SU. Staff are encouraged to review past personal social media, which if reviewed in the present day, could be perceived to have a connection to Durham SU by virtue of the employment relationship. Staff are also required to consider that personal social media content published while employed by Durham is likely to be perceived to have a connection to Durham SU by virtue of the employment relationship.

- 8.3 Durham SU will consider questions about content on social media published by staff, both before and since the start of employment, using policies in place for staff performance, grievance, discipline, and safeguarding, and other relevant policies.
- 8.4 Staff must make it clear that they do not have authority to speak on behalf of Durham SU unless authority is granted by the Chief Executive in writing. If personal social media accounts engage with topics adjacent to Durham SU's work or otherwise of public interest, a disclaimer is advised: "My views are my own, and don't represent Durham SU's positions, policies or opinions."
- 8.4.1 Staff who have a personal blog, website or commercial social media presence (for example, a freelance profile or running your own business) which indicates in any way that they work at Durham SU should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with their line manager and the Marketing Team. Similarly, staff who want to start blogging or start a commercial channel and wish to say that they work for Durham SU should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with their line manager and the Marketing Team.
- 8.4.2 Senior staff, Officers and specialist roles where staff are well known in their field of expertise must take particular care as personal views published may be misunderstood as expressing Durham SU's view. The Chief Executive will notify any staff likely to be described in this category and discuss particular risk mitigation measures.
- 8.4.3 When they may be considered to be representing Durham SU, staff are expected to hold Durham SU's position on non-partisan political neutrality. Staff who are politically active in their personal time life to be clear in separating their personal political identity from Durham SU and understand and avoid potential conflicts of interest, including on their personal social media channels.
- 8.4.4 If a staff member is contacted by the press about their social media posts in any way that that relates to Durham SU they should talk to the Marketing Team immediately and under no circumstances respond unless authorised to do so.
- 8.4.5 Durham SU does not permit staff to use its logos or trademarks, or those of any of Durham SU's student groups on personal channels, unless authorised to do so by the Marketing Manager.
- 8.4.6 We encourage staff to share tweets and posts that we have published. Where appropriate and using the guidelines within this policy, we encourage staff to do so, as it provides a human voice and raises our profile. However, if the content is inadvertently controversial or misrepresented, staff should highlight this to the Marketing Manager.

9. Responsibilities and breach of policy

- 9.1 Everyone is responsible for their own compliance with this policy. Participation in social media on behalf of Durham SU is not a right but an opportunity, so it must be treated seriously and with respect. For staff, breaches of policy may incur disciplinary action, depending on the severity of the issue. Please refer to our [Disciplinary Policy](#) for further information on disciplinary procedures. Staff who are unsure about whether something they propose to do on social media might breach this policy should seek advice from the Marketing Manager.

Terms and Further Guidance

- a) Internet access and monitoring usage

There are currently no access restrictions to any of our social media sites in the Durham SU office or on Durham SU devices. However, when using the internet at work, it is important that staff refer to [Durham SU's Data Protection](#) and [Remote Working Device Use Policy](#) and [Durham University staff IT User policy](#). You are permitted to make reasonable and appropriate use of personal social media activity during your breaks.

b) Public Interest Disclosure

Staff or volunteers with access to social media channels may have reason to make a public interest disclosure (whistleblow) but there is not likely to be any reason why use of social media channels to make the disclosure would be appropriate rather than, for example, to a line manager, trustee, University colleague, regulator, or the police. Staff or volunteers can seek guidance on this from [ACAS](#) or [Protect](#).

c) Libel

Libel is when a false written statement that is damaging to a person's reputation is published online or in print. Whether staff are posting content on social media as part of their job or in a personal capacity, they should not bring Durham SU into disrepute by making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups.

d) Copyright law

It is critical that all staff abide by the laws governing copyright. Never use or adapt someone else's images, music, video, audio content, brand language or written content without permission. Failing to acknowledge the source/author/resource citation, where permission has been given to reproduce content, may also be considered a breach of copyright.

e) Confidentiality

Any communications that staff make in a personal capacity must not breach confidentiality. For example, information meant for internal use only or information that Durham SU is not ready to disclose yet. For example, a news story that is embargoed for a particular date.

f) Discrimination and harassment

Staff should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, on either an official Durham SU social media channel or a personal account. For example: making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief, using social media to bully another individual, or posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content.

g) Political activity

Charities are legally allowed to campaign to bring about a change in policy or law to further their organisational purpose. In most cases, spending on charity campaigns that are in accordance with charity law will not be regulated under electoral law.

Campaigning activities on social media must not be seen as intending to influence people's voting choice. During periods of an election, all campaigning activity will be reviewed by the Marketing Manager and authorised by the Chief Executive.

h) Use of social media in the recruitment process

Recruitment should be carried out in accordance with Durham SU's [recruitment policy](#), and associated procedures and guidelines. Any advertising of vacancies should be done through the Finance and Governance Team.

There should be no systematic or routine checking of candidate's online social media activities during the recruitment process, as conducting these searches might lead to a presumption that an applicant's protected characteristics, such as religious beliefs or sexual orientation, played a part in a recruitment decision. If examples, if an applicant's social media skill are sought, then they should be asked to provide the name of an account or portfolio of content for review in the recruitment process, and other channels should not be considered. This is in line with Durham SU's data protection policy.