

Social Media Policy (for employees)

1. Introduction:

- 1.1 The Social Media policy is designed to clarify what Aberystwyth University defines as the acceptable use of electronic social networking facilities. Social networking can be used internally to promote levels of engagement and externally to help promote brand, reputation and initiatives. Whilst the University welcomes contributions to its community via social media, there is a need to ensure that such contributions are conducted in a respectful manner which does not disregard the dignity of others, or jeopardise its compliance with legal obligations.
- 1.2 This policy specifies the standards that are expected of University employees when communicating through social media web based sites. It is also intended to give clear guidelines to employees on acceptable standards of communication and use in both a professional and personal capacity during offices hours or otherwise, help line managers to manage performance, as well as to protect the University against liability for the actions of its employees. It will help employees to differentiate between their private and professional usage and comply with the law on discrimination, defamation, data protection and the overall health and well-being of colleagues. It is applicable to any member of staff in employment with the university including full and part-time staff, casual and agency staff, trainees or work placements, and, in addition, to contractors or consultants. The University's Social media guidance for students is also available at <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/social-media/onlinesafety/>
- 1.3 The policy suggests standards of best practice for social networking, while being clear about disciplinary measures, monitoring and how they could be applied.

2. Definition of Social Media:

- 2.1 For the purpose of this policy, social media is any type of interactive online forum that allows parties to communicate with each other, instantly or otherwise, or to share data in a publicly viewable environment. This includes online social forums such as Facebook LinkedIn, Tumbler, WhatsApp and Twitter, personal blogs and video/image sharing sites like YouTube, or any other online facility or communication portal that currently exists or may be created in the future.

3. Philosophy:

- 3.1 The University welcomes contributions from all its community to social media channels and that people interact with the University and with each other in areas such as studying at the University, research, news, events and any other student, employee or alumni related activities.
- 3.2 The University also recognises the desire of staff to access external social media sites but requires that all social networking communication be respectful of the University, its employees, students, visitors or community.

4. Appropriate Use of Social Media:

- 4.1 Employees are allowed to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media websites from the University's computers in the course of their employment, provided that this does not interfere with their duties. Social networking activity must not interfere with the employee's primary job responsibilities. Employees should not spend an excessive amount of time whilst at work using social media sites and should limit their personal use to official rest breaks such as lunch time or when travelling between appointments.
- 4.2 The University recognises that employees may wish to use their own communication devices such as a mobile phone to access social media while they are at work. However, they should limit this use to official rest breaks such as lunch time or when travelling between appointments. Where possible such devices should be set to 'silent'.
- 4.3 When using social media in a personal capacity staff must be aware that, should they make ill-judged comments or post insensitive material whilst being identified as an employee, they run the risk of damaging the reputation of the University. Therefore, there must always be a clear distinction between business and private use of social media. Staff using social media sites for personal or domestic purposes are reminded that they should do so in a responsible manner and that they are liable for their own content and conduct. Members of staff are allowed to state that they work for the University but their own personal online profile name should not contain the University's name.. Employees with personal social media accounts should be mindful of who can view their profile and act accordingly.
- 4.4 Unless an employee is engaging in social networking for the specific purpose of University business such as marketing or educational purposes as defined by their role, identification with the University for commercial or personal purposes is prohibited. Employees should neither claim nor imply that they are speaking on the University's behalf unless permission is granted to do so

by the University Executive Group. This includes the use of University logos, brand names, slogans or any other trademarks.

- 4.5 Employees discussing their work on social media websites must include on their profile a statement such as ‘The views I express in this posting are mine alone and do not reflect the views of my employer’.
- 4.6 A University e-mail address should not be used when registering in a personal capacity on social media sites. It may only be used when registering for the purpose of University business. The University’s email policy is available on www.aber.ac.uk/en/infocompliance/policies/e-mail.
- 4.7 For staff relying on social media for up to the minute news, information and communications regarding the higher education sector, more frequent use is acceptable if part of their role, duties or if instructed by their line manager
- 4.8 Employees specifically engaged in social networking to promote the University should use the following safeguards:
- Make sure that the communication has a purpose and a benefit for the University
 - Obtain permission from their line manager before embarking on a public campaign using social media
 - Ensure that the Communications and Public Affairs department are advised and have approved content before it is published online
 - Ensure that content does not bring the University or its community into disrepute, breach confidentiality, infringe copyright or do anything that could be considered discriminatory, offensive or derogatory.

In addition, the University’s Welsh Language Scheme requires correspondence with the public to be bilingual or in the recipient’s preferred language. Social media content should follow this principle in that any corporate general University accounts e.g. Facebook for Prospective Students and Applicants, or Information Services Twitter feeds, should either be bilingual or have separate accounts for each language. With more specific accounts e.g. Facebook sites of individual academic staff, then either language may be used or both. Departmental sites are encouraged to use Welsh as well as English whenever practically possible.

- 4.9 Employees engaged in social networking for educational, research or information purposes should use the following safeguards:

- Obtain appropriate permission from senior departmental or Institute employees before using social networking for such purposes and ensure that any ethical implications have been reviewed and addressed
- Ensure that appropriate privacy or other settings (if relevant) have been applied to discussion groups
- Ensure that content does not bring the University or its community into disrepute, breach confidentiality, infringe copyright or do anything that could be considered discriminatory, offensive or derogatory.

5. Behaviour:

- 5.1 Employees are reminded that they have an overall responsibility for confidentiality, trust and acceptable behaviour towards colleagues and that this applies as much to electronic forms of communications as it does to any other social interactions. Please refer to other University Policies such as Health and Wellbeing and Health & Safety for further information.
- 5.2 The University has [Equality](#) and [Dignity and Respect at Work](#) policies which should be adhered to at all times to ensure a positive and safe working environment. Employees should be aware of the way in which they interact with other users of social media and the need for respect and courtesy at all times. Comments which are regarded as inappropriate may constitute forms of discrimination, bullying and/or harassment and will be investigated under the appropriate policy framework. Comments which are considered as being defamatory (libellous and slanderous) are also prohibited. Where allegations are upheld, disciplinary action may be taken which could include dismissal where allegations of a serious nature are involved.
- 5.3 Bullying covers any behaviour that may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting, or an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient/s. Harassment in general terms may be defined as unwanted conduct and may relate to any protected characteristic including age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/belief, sex (gender) or sexual orientation. It also includes any personal characteristic of the individual and may be persistent or an isolated incident.
- 5.4 Any form of discrimination, harassment, bullying, libel, defamation, indecent language, slander, abuse, or obscenities are prohibited in any form of social media communication (including data, images or links to such material). Deliberate attempts to damage the reputation of any work colleague(s) are prohibited and may result in disciplinary action. Employees are encouraged

to raise their concerns with the author or raise their concerns with the Human Resources Department in the first instance using the form in Appendix 1. Whilst the University understands rights to privacy and freedom of expression, it must also consider personal and reputational damage that can impact on others and on the University.

- 5.5 Any users that contravene this policy may have their IS access blocked, monitored or removed. Employees may be required to remove internet postings which are deemed to constitute a breach of this policy. (pull wording from Data protection, ref Jonathan) Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in disciplinary action.
- 5.6 In the case of any suspected or reported breach of this policy, the University reserves the right to monitor the internet usage of individual members of staff (ref to IS policy). Employees should be aware that content uploaded anonymously can, in many cases, be traced back to its point of origin. The University considers that valid reasons for monitoring internet usage include suspicions that a member of employees has been using social media websites when they should be working, or that they have acted in another way that contravenes this policy or other University policies. Line managers are actively encouraged to deal with matters, in the first instance, at a low level before raising matters more formally under the IS policy.
- 5.7 Employees must not use social media as a forum to air their grievances about their employment, colleagues or their employer. Any such issues should be taken up in accordance with the Grievance Procedure or any other University resource e.g. EAP, HR department, Trade Union rep etc.
- 5.8 Identity theft, i.e. impersonating another user in a social media forum in order to insult someone anonymously, download illegal or inappropriate content or to obtain important personal information is prohibited. Such action will be dealt with under the University disciplinary procedures and, if proven, may constitute gross misconduct.

6. Safety and Compliance

- 6.1 All employees must at all times comply with the law with regards to health and safety and the use of technology eg employees should be aware of the need to take regulated breaks away from IT equipment.
<https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/media/departmental/healthsafetyenvironment/AU-HSE-Policy.pdf>
- 6.2. Employees must also at all times comply with the law in regards to intellectual property, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hr/policy-and->

[procedure/au-and-bu/intellectual-property/](#) copyright and data protection (see www.aber.ac.uk/en/infocompliance/policies for compliance guidance). Employees should respect the ownership rights of online content and should seek appropriate permission for the re-use of material. Further, in terms of contributions to social network sites, employees should never attempt to pass off others' work as their own, whether these are minor comments or more substantial works. <https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hr/policy-and-procedure/misconduct/>

- 6.2 When using social media websites it is important that employees are aware of the risks and take steps to protect themselves and their personal information (see [general advice](#) on Information Services website). Employees should never disclose their University password to anyone and must always take care to keep login information private. Posting personal information could potentially lead to unwanted attention and could even contribute to identity fraud.
- 6.3 Employees should be aware that when accessing social media websites through the University's facilities that Information Services rules and regulations will apply (see Regulations and Guidelines on www.aber.ac.uk/en/is/about/regulations). Employees should be aware that if any passwords are compromised other site users could post comments which could reflect badly on the account holder. In such cases the IS Helpdesk and social media site must be contacted as soon as possible to report a compromised account.
- 6.4 Information owned by the University is not to be discussed or referred to on social media sites, even in private messages between site members who have authorised access to the information.
- 6.5 Many online social networking or media facilities allow users to set privacy levels. It is important that employees are aware of how these work and recognise the importance of implementing appropriate settings. Employees should regularly review their privacy settings to ensure they are appropriate.
- 6.6 Matters considered to be of public interest must be raised in accordance with the University's Whistleblowing Policy in order to benefit from the safeguards afforded under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1999 (<https://www.aber.ac.uk/en/hr/policy-and-procedure/whistleblowing/>).

7. Non-compliance:

- 7.1 All employees must read and comply with this policy. Employees should note that any breaches of this policy may lead to the instigation of the University's disciplinary procedure. Serious breaches of this policy, for example incidents of bullying of colleagues or social media activity causing serious damage to the reputation of the University, may, if substantiated, constitute gross misconduct and may lead to dismissal.
- 7.2 Any member of employees who becomes aware of inappropriate use of social media forums as set out in this policy should immediately contact the Human Resources Department, giving screenshots of the relevant social media site where possible. The identity of the member of employees reporting such activity will remain anonymous.

8. Equality Impact Assessment:

- 8.1 The University is committed to embedding the Strategic Equality Plan into its policies, procedures and practices. This policy has been equality impact assessed in accordance with this policy.

9. Policy Review:

- 9.1 This policy will be reviewed every 12 months in conjunction with the trade unions. Employees are invited to comment on this policy and suggest ways in which it might be improved by contacting the Human Resources Department.