Social Media Guidelines

A social media guide for students at the University of Stirling

Updated September 2018

Communications, Marketing and Recruitment
Introduction and Aim

At the University of Stirling, social media is a big part of how we communicate and engage with our students, staff, alumni, media and other stakeholders.

As part of our commitment to the student experience, the University’s Communications, Marketing and Recruitment directorate (CMR) has created this short guide to help our students manage their online social media presence, minimise risk, and be aware of the potential impact social media can have on their time at the University and the influence it could have on their future careers.

This guidance document should be considered alongside existing University policies and codes as listed in Appendix B, and not in isolation. This guidance document aims to ensure students are well informed about their responsibilities as a student of the University of Stirling and that they are conducting themselves in a way that is consistently appropriate within the University community, and in terms of the Student Code and Ordinance 2 of the Code of Student Discipline which applies to all students of the University.

This guidance also aims to enhance the University’s online reputation, increase our brand visibility, promote our excellent research reputation, facilitate academic study and more. However, social media also comes with its own set of risks that should be considered and managed appropriately.

As stated, the following document is intended to provide basic guidance and direction in terms of using social media. For any further questions please contact the CMR social media team at digital@stir.ac.uk
Staying Safe on Social Media – Things to consider

Location Sharing

On social media and the wider internet, it’s important to stay safe. By sharing personal data or information about yourself, you could be putting yourself at risk – so only share information when you’re comfortable doing so.

Be wary of using certain social media platforms or other applications which request permission to access your phone’s GPS/location information or apps which have a ‘check-in’ feature which will publicly display where you are at any given time. Sharing your content in this way can reveal your actual whereabouts, or when you’re not at home, potentially putting you or your property at risk. If you ever feel you’re in danger, you should call Police Scotland.

Phishing Scams

Watch out for phishing scams through social media or email. If a link looks suspect, don’t click on it. You could be giving away access to all your personal data and information – including bank account details. If it looks too good to be true, it probably is.

Digital footprint: Your reputation and your career

Future employers will very likely do their research on you before making any job offers. It is common practice for employers to user search engines and social media to vet prospective employees during the recruitment process. Make sure your public social media ‘footprint’ shows you in a good light.

Tools like Google Ad Preview can allow you to see what search results are returned without your browser history or cookies influencing the results. Set the Domain to www.google.co.uk and search for your name. You may be surprised what you see.

Posts doesn’t always stay private

Be aware that there is a possibility of anything posted online (publicly or privately) could spread beyond the originally intended platform and audience. Whether through carelessness, hacking or otherwise. Any content you send through social media could find its way into the public domain. It is extremely difficult to ever have something permanently taken down once posted online.
Never feel pressured into sending content that you are not comfortable sharing with others – such as nude photos – regardless of what others may say to try and persuade you. When the fun stops, stop communication.

Section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 means it is an offence to disclose private sexual/nude photographs or films without the consent of an individual who appears in them and with intent to cause that individual distress.

Remember, your usage of social media is not anonymous and can be tracked – so it’s best to exercise caution and not to post anything that might land you in trouble.

Guidance on posting to social media

Think Twice Before Posting

It’s important to consider carefully what you post on social media, most of the time this comes down to basic common sense and exercising good judgement before you post. It’s worth taking that extra minute just to check what you are about to post. Remember, once posted it could potentially be shared to a wider audience. Removing the original post provides no guarantee that it has been completely removed from the internet, so make sure you’re completely comfortable before posting anything.

Whilst open discussion and debate of ideas and opinions on social media is encouraged, you should also remember that your personal identity may well be associated with the University in many social media contexts.

You should not post anything inflammatory that could incite extreme reactions from others – that could potentially put yourself or others at risk (as above, you should contact the police if you feel threatened, or if you’re in danger).

Students should adhere to the specific terms and conditions of the respective social media platforms as to what constitutes inappropriate use. In general, types of social media posts/content that should be avoided can include, but is not limited to:

- Confidential information that is not yet in the public domain
- Personal information about students, staff or personnel matters
- Non-public, confidential or not yet approved University documents or information
- Publication of explicit material portraying someone who has not consented for the image or video to be shared. (it is illegal to disclose a "private sexual photograph or film" without the consent of the person depicted in the content, and with the intent to cause them distress).
- Details of complaints and/or legal proceedings – or potential legal proceedings – involving the University
- Personal information about another individual – including contact information – without their expressed permission
• Comments posted using fake accounts or using another person’s name without their consent
• Material that is threatening, harassing, discriminatory, illegal, obscene, racist, indecent, defamatory, or hostile towards any individual or entity
• Any other posting that constitutes a criminal offence
• Anything that may compromise the safety or reputation of colleagues, former colleagues, students, staff and those connected with the University
• Graphic violence
• Content of a sexual nature
• Hate speech (hateful, threatening, or abusive speech that targets a person on account of disability, ethnic or national origin, nationality (including citizenship), race, religion, sexual orientation, or skin colour. The penalties for hate speech include fines, imprisonment, or both)

Remember, individuals can be prosecuted under the Communications Act 2003 if they are deemed to have made threats or posted content which is considered grossly offensive, indecent, obscene or false.

Further guidance from the The Crown Prosecution Service as to what constitutes criminal offences as a result of social media activity can be found here

Consider your tone

The tone of your communications should always be civil, polite and clear. By doing so, you’re minimising the risks of others taking offence. Remember that messages can be lost in translation, particularly between different cultures across the globe.

Social media is a great medium for debate, but it’s important to keep a level head when involved in online conversations. If you know that you’re getting involved in a conversation with others on a sensitive subject, be aware that not everyone will agree with your point of view.

Be respectful

It’s important to be respectful of others on social media, especially when considering other cultures, religions and nationalities. What may seem like an off-the-cuff remark to you may be offensive to others. Remember that statements which are clearly ironic or sarcastic when spoken can often lose tone or context when presented online.

You should also be aware that what you say on social media may attract complaints from other students, staff members or members of the public. This may result in disciplinary action. See Appendix B (The University of Stirling Students’ Code of Discipline).

The University supports freedom of speech and academic freedom, subject to that freedom being expressed in a personal capacity and exercised within the appropriate legal boundaries.
Avoid spreading misinformation

If you’re sharing content that you know to be false or disingenuous, you’re spreading ‘fake news’. This contributes to a worldwide problem – the spread of misinformation – whilst fake news concerning an individual or group could be deemed as bullying, harassment or hate speech. Hate crimes committed on social media will be treated as seriously as similar street-based offences, according to new guidelines issued by the Crown Prosecution Service.

Consider how you reference the University

The University of Stirling brand is a key part of the University’s identity, and how we communicate to our stakeholders.

How we apply the brand is important – you should consider how you use the University of Stirling brand in any of your content, particularly if you use our logo on behalf of student groups, clubs or societies.

If this applies to you, you should always refer to the University of Stirling Brand Bank (www.stir.ac.uk/brandbank) to ensure the appropriate use of logos and brand materials. You can contact digital@stir.ac.uk for any further questions or guidance regarding use of brand assets.

University of Stirling branded hashtags – such as #BeTheDifference, #IamStirling, #BleedGreen or other event-based hashtags – should not be posted or ‘hijacked’ with content that could potentially cause offence to others (see previous list for examples of inappropriate content)

Using social media as part of your studies

The University actively encourages students who use social media as part of their academic studies to engage responsibly and professionally with social media. As the barriers between personal and academic use of social media can be poorly defined, it is important to consider how your activity reflects on you and the reputation of the University. Students on professional courses should also be aware that using social media irresponsibly whilst a student can have an effect on their placement.

When using social media as part of your academic studies (study groups, individual or group course work, assignments etc.) students should still adhere to the student code and academic misconduct. Students should refer to Appendix B for further information relating to policies and codes.

Contacts and advice
If you’re in danger, you should contact Police Scotland immediately:

- 999 for emergencies
- 101 for non-emergencies

If you’re experiencing online abuse, your first port of call should be the University’s Student Support Services:

- [http://www.stir.ac.uk/student-support/](http://www.stir.ac.uk/student-support/)
- Ext 2222 or 01786 467999 to reach University Security for campus emergencies

For advice on safe usage of social media and digital communications, contact the University Communications, Marketing and Recruitment Directorate:

- communications@stir.ac.uk for communications queries
- digital@stir.ac.uk for social media queries
- marketingtools@stir.ac.uk for queries relating to the University brand

Appendix A: About this guidance

Additional information

- The content of this document should only be shared in its original format with no edits, omissions or additions
- This document should be considered alongside other University policies and guidelines, such as the IT Acceptable Use Policy and the Student Code – and not in isolation.
- This document is not a University policy with regards to student social media usage, it is merely guidance to help students understand and mitigate risks.
- Please refer to Appendix B for official University policies governing student conduct.

Definition of terms

“Social media”
Web applications that allow for sharing of content, information or dialogue between one or more parties. Examples include Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram.

“Content”
Anything published through social media or other web application

“Personal data”
Information identifying the person or their location, including name, address, telephone number, etc.

“Fake news”
Online content written and published with the intent to mislead others, often for an individual or group’s financial gain.

“Phishing”
The fraudulent practice of sending emails purporting to be from reputable companies in order to induce individuals to reveal personal information, such as passwords and credit card numbers.

“Cookie”
A small text file (up to 4KB) created by a website that is stored in the user’s computer either temporarily for that session only or permanently on the hard disk (persistent cookie). Cookies provide a way for the website to recognize you and keep track of your preferences.

Appendix B: Related University policies and guidance

The University of Stirling Student Code
http://www.stir.ac.uk/campus-life/student-code/

The University of Stirling Equality & Diversity Policy
http://www.stir.ac.uk/media/services/registry/planning/ed/EqualityandDiversityPolicy.pdf

The University of Stirling IT Use Policy
http://www.hr-services.stir.ac.uk/documents/StaffAntiBullyingandHarassmentPolicy.pdf

The University of Stirling Academic Policy and Practices
http://www.stir.ac.uk/academicpolicy/

Preventing and Tackling Sexual Violence and Misconduct (#IsThisOk)
https://www.stir.ac.uk/tacklingsexualmisconduct/

The University of Stirling Students’ Union Policies
https://www.stirlingstudentsunion.com/aboutus/governanceandplanning/

The University of Stirling Students’ Code of Discipline
The Code of Student Discipline sets out how the University responds to and deals with student conduct which is in breach of the Code. It notes offences which may result in the University taking disciplinary action, including offences related to social media-related issues.
The Code of Student Discipline can be accessed at: http://www.stir.ac.uk/media/services/calendar/ordinances/2-ordinances-code-of-student-discipline.pdf.

The Code includes reference to online behaviour in a number of items, listed below:

- **Level 1 Offences (including elements below)**
  - Verbal, written, on-line or actual abuse, threat or intimidation;
  - Anti-social or offensive behaviour which causes or could cause distress, concern or disruption to others and/or to University activity;
  - Anti-social behaviour which causes or could cause reputational harm to the University;
  - Anti-social behaviour which causes or could cause damage to the University’s relationship with the local or wider external community;

- **Level 2 Offences (including elements below)**
  - Serious or persistent verbal, physical or online acts of bullying, harassment or intimidation;
  - Serious threatening behaviour
  - Conduct which offends or otherwise represents a breach of public decency;

The University of Stirling Students’ Union Governance, Policy & Planning
https://www.stirlingstudentsunion.com/aboutus/governanceandplanning/

Appendix C: Relevant Legislation

**Communications Act 2003**

Individuals can be prosecuted under the Communications Act 2003 if they are deemed to have made threats or posted content which is considered grossly offensive, indecent, obscene or false.

Further information on the types of offences prosecutable under the Act can be found here.