Social Media Compliance Policy

2020

1. Position Statement

This policy provides staff with information, advice and guidelines on how to safely, productively and proactively use social media.

Social media provides benefits and opportunities for all members of the University and is a key way to communicate with our many and varied audiences.

The purpose of Edge Hill University's social media activity is to inform, educate, engage and listen. It is a useful tool which allows for the promotion and distribution of key messages, announcements, successes/achievements, attracting applicants, improving student engagement, showcasing academic expertise, connecting with alumni and partners, enhancing brand and reputation and broadening regional, national and international reach, also providing instant feedback or response.

However, along with benefits come the risks inherent in managing something that is fast-paced and unlimited in scale. These include the risk of reputational damage arising from improper use by staff, students or third parties, threats to security of sensitive or confidential information, exposure to viruses and a negative impact on productivity.

We support the use of social media to engage with the wider community and have produced guidance and training to ensure this engagement is safe and responsible, to ensure legal compliance and reputational management.

This policy will provide clear guidance about the acceptable and most effective use of social media across all Edge Hill University related accounts, departments, services and sub-brands.

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Social Media Best Practice Guidance
- IT Acceptable Use Policy
- Data Protection Information Governance Policy
- Web Accessibility
- Brand Guidelines (to be updated)
- Photography policy
- Using Social Media to Disseminate Research

2. Scope of the Policy

For the purposes of this policy, social media is defined as any online interactive communication tool which encourages participation, engagement or exchanges, including liking, sharing and commenting on other people's content and posts which may be interpreted as a form of endorsement. This includes, but is not limited to: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Messenger, YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, Tumblr, WeChat, Reddit, Pinterest, LinkedIn and could also include the use of external internet message boards and chat rooms. There are many more examples of social media and this is a constantly changing area.

This policy should be followed in relation to any social media usage and applies to all staff, who directly or indirectly represent the University online.

It is aimed at all staff who are concerned with the use or development of any social media application, to help them get the best out of the tools available while maintaining a safe professional environment and protecting themselves as well as the University.

The scope of this policy also includes students who are paid to work as content creators, ambassadors or where they respond to questions and enquiries online on behalf of the University. This includes communicating on a social media channel, public forum, message board, online chat, or any other channel where they are representing the University, either directly or indirectly.

The policy applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using the University's IT facilities or equipment belonging to individuals.

3. Legal risks, threats and risks to the University

Every message, post, piece of digital content and line of communication from corporate social media accounts represents Edge Hill University. It is of critical importance that each message is carefully considered, appropriate, reflective of the University's objectives and does not damage or bring the organisation into disrepute. Content should also be accurate, honest and in alignment with the organisation's key values.

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Remember, the legalities, risks and threats to the University are similar to those experienced with other forms of communication, with added issues of speed, visibility or response by others, scale of visibility and permanence.

There are a number of pieces of legislation relevant to the use of social media, including defamation, harassment, malicious falsehood, breach of confidence, the Malicious Communications Act, Computer Misuse Act and the General Data Protection Act.

Staff posting content on corporate social media accounts must not do the following:

- Post or promote content which harasses, bullies or otherwise intimidates;
- Post or promote content which instructs, causes or coerces others to harass, bully or otherwise intimidate;
- Post or promote content intended to incite violence or hatred;
- Post or promote abusive content relating to an individual's age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation;
- Include confidential information about an individual or organisation;
- Breach security or the professionalism and confidentiality rules of their department;
- Bring the University into disrepute;
- Breach copyright, such as sharing photos, moving images or audio files and documents;
- Post material which could result in reputational damage, complaints or legal action;
- Reveal future plans of the University that have not been communicated to the public;
- Post anything reflecting their personal views.

4. Social Media Use (Including Personal Use)

All staff of the University using social media, in any capacity that can be associated with the University, including individual accounts, must be aware that legal requirements, professional expectations and guidelines apply at all times.

The Corporate Communications and External Relations Team manage all the University's central social media accounts and you should contact them for more information on how to use social media in a professional capacity.

Remember, professional communications are those posted through an institutional account, and those accounts must be registered with Corporate Communications and External Relations.

Personal communications are those made through a private social media account.

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It should be clearly understood that where a private account is used in a way which states, implies or could be inferred as identifying Edge Hill University as your employer, it should always be made clear that you are not communicating on behalf of the University using an appropriate disclaimer.

Private communications that do not refer to the University (implicitly or explicitly) are not covered by this guidance.

5. Official Accounts and Ownership

In circumstances where a University social media account is required, a business case should be completed first. This form is available on the Communications and External Relations Team's Wiki page, who will consider the key issues, along with HR, if appropriate.

All official University social media accounts on every platform that have been approved must be registered with Corporate Communications and External Relations. The team has the authority to refuse applications that don't have a clear business need, dilute institutional messages, or cannot be resourced properly.

Consideration should be given to the naming of pages or accounts; the selection of a profile picture or icon and the content being posted. As part of the business case process you will be asked to outline the aims and objectives, target audience and strategy for using appropriate content and keeping the information and the account up-to-date.

Communication via social media sites and tools must protect the University's institutional voice by remaining professional but friendly in tone and in good taste.

Integrity of information must be maintained. Information must be accurate, complete, timely and consistent with other related information and events.

All University accounts and pages must have an associated staff member who is identified as being the information asset holder and who is responsible for its official affiliation of the University. Login details should be stored securely and shared with the Corporate Communications and External Relations Team to prevent loss of access.

Access to accounts should be limited and should be revoked as appropriate, for example, when a colleague leaves the University or is no longer responsible for social media administration. Students and temporary staff should not have sole responsibility for social media accounts.

Named contacts of social media accounts should check their messages and notifications regularly and respond or forward any enquiries in a timely fashion.

Any enquiries or approaches from media sources (newspapers, radio, TV) should be referred to the Corporate Communications and External Relations Team.

Paid-for boosting or promotion of social media content is a form of advertising which is centralised activity. Paid for online promotional campaigns must only be carried out by, or with the agreement of the Marketing Recruitment Team.

6. Content and Best Practice

The Corporate Communications and External Relations Team has produced a further guidance and best practice document to refer to. Some highlights include:

University position - social media announcements which declare an official University position, policy or strategy must be made through central accounts or approved by Corporate Communications and External Relations on behalf of Directorate. It is preferable that any promotion of University-wide events such as open days, graduation, applicant visit days or corporate events are communicated via the central accounts and shared by other University accounts. When linking to news articles or University responses, use the official release on the University website rather than an external link.

Branding – Use of the logo must be in line with University's Branding Guidelines and must not be used for personal social media accounts or sites. If staff wish to discuss their work on social media, it should be made clear on profile statements, descriptions or biographies that views expressed are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the University.

Sharing content - be mindful that liking, sharing and commenting on other people's content and posts may be interpreted as a form of endorsement and bear in mind how it might reflect on the University by doing so.

Accessibility - All film and video content should have subtitles for accessibility purposes. It is understood and accepted that some of this content may be livestreamed and/or produced for immediate use. In such instances, subtitles are not required, but a full transcript of audio content of such material should be made available upon request.

Tone of voice - is professional yet friendly and all departments should aim to project this, while maintaining standards for spelling and grammar. As an ambitious University that celebrates success, language is encouraged that is inspiring, creates an inclusive environment and instils pride.

Photography - GDPR guidance means that consent should be sought for posting photographs and videos of named individuals and groups. Please see the Photography Policy for further information and the official consent form. Please do not use other people's images or photography without crediting them or seeking their consent.

7. Content Removal

The University, via the Corporate Communications and External Relations Team, has the right to request the removal of content from an official social media account and from a personal account if it is deemed that the account or its submissions pose a risk to the reputation of the University or to one of its staff or students.

If content on a University account is deemed inappropriate the team will contact you to remove the post. If there is no response or the content is offensive or abusive in nature, then the team may access the account to remove the post. You will be contacted to confirm what has been removed and why.

Any misuse or use of social media that may bring the University or one of its staff or students into disrepute should be reported to the team in the first instance. In some circumstances the team may ask for a social media account to deleted.

8. Education and Training

The Corporate Communications and External Relations Team will provide staff development sessions for any staff members who require training on using social media platforms and hosts regular social media forums to share best practice and guidance.

9. Critical Incidents

Very occasionally, the University may face a critical incident which could take place on or off campus and could affect or involve students, staff or visitors. This could include, but is not limited to, incidents such as power failures, fires, injury or death.

During these incidents an Emergency Management Team will meet centrally and no posts, or shares, likes or retweets should be issued from any University accounts. Departments will be notified if any such incidents take place. Any information received regarding the incident should be reported directly to the Corporate Communications and External Relations Team.

Any information that needs to be shared will be agreed by the Emergency Management Team and posted on the central University accounts. At this time, other University accounts can share the information but should refrain from any further postings or comments until the critical period is over.

Please be mindful of any future postings and content in the immediate aftermath of the critical incident.

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10. Consequences

As employees of Edge Hill University, we all have a duty to ensure that any materials we publish are in no way deemed to be offensive or inappropriate or might be perceived as offensive or inappropriate by our audiences.

Any failure by an employee to comply with the provisions of this guidance may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

The University may instruct an employee to remove any social media content considered as constituting a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with any such request may in itself result in formal disciplinary action being taken.

In cases of any disciplinary action relating to social media, the University will follow its normal disciplinary policy.

11. Authorisation and Review

This policy is owned by Corporate Communications and External Relations Team whose responsibility it is to ensure that the policy is implemented, communicated and reviewed on an annual basis or as circumstances require, through a consultative process.