

Social media policy

Why do we need this policy?

Social media is a key part of everyday life for most people. Many of us use it in our personal lives to communicate with friends and family, to make new connections, find support networks, and consume content from communities with similar interests.

In the workplace, digital technology continues to revolutionise the way in which people communicate and share information at local, national and international levels.

As employees working for an arm's length body of government (ALB) it is important that our people stay up to date on developments in this space and understand how to operate effectively within it.

Use of social media holds opportunities, but also carries with it risks, both for individual members of staff and for the wider organisation. This policy therefore aims to make clear the organisation's view on acceptable use.

We positively encourage staff and partners to take advantage of the academic, business, professional and personal opportunities provided by social media in a safe manner and in line with this policy.

Who needs to follow this policy and why?

All employees, partners and board members of Social Work England must follow this policy and are also bound by our [electronic usage policy](#) when browsing websites or downloading content.

Any alleged misuse of social media should be reported to your line manager (for employees) to the Head of Adjudications (for partners), and to the Corporate Governance Manager (for Board members). Advice should be taken from your people business partner on any further action.

As with most things, we would always prefer to deal with things informally in the first instance, however, depending on the circumstances and severity of the issue, it may be necessary to consider the matter under our [disciplinary policy](#). Our disciplinary policy would be used in cases relating to our employees and Board members.

Where concerns are raised about our partners, these would be addressed in accordance with our Partner Handbook.

What does this policy cover?

This guidance covers the use of social media networks such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Facebook, and digital activity in general, both in and out of work, e.g. posting or publishing anything to the web or via messaging services which can be screenshotted.

It includes private messages if these are brought to our attention or shared publicly through images and screenshots.

The policy applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using Social Work England IT facilities and equipment or equipment belonging to employees.

Using social media on behalf of Social Work England

Staff should not use social media on behalf of, or appearing to be on behalf of, Social Work England.

Official social media accounts are governed under Government Communication Service (GCS) best practice guidelines and are run by Social Work England's communications team.

As an arm's length body of government, the organisation must remain impartial in any party-political commentary and must avoid entering into criticism of individuals or groups, or posting comments that could be perceived by the public as tasteless or offensive.

We should avoid commenting negatively on the policies or practices of our key stakeholders, to ensure that we do not undermine trust in Social Work England and our mission - to enable positive change in social work.

Our official social media accounts are run by the communications team and are dedicated to sharing corporate information, as well as responding to public queries.

Some of our people have a public facing role and as such have had training and support on how to use social media to facilitate that, for example the regional engagement team. However, if any of us are approached on a work matter via social media, we should be careful to seek advice before responding. It may not always be obvious if we are being approached by a blogger or journalist, and public comments can be seen more widely, so do refer specific queries to our communications team.

Particular care should be taken to avoid sharing personal and identifiable information about colleagues and those who engage with us, via social media and other digital channels.

Personal use of social media

Staff should not use Social Work England devices to access their personal social media. Devices owned by Social Work England can be subject to monitoring at any time, and information held on Social Work England devices may be [subject to information requests](#).

Courts also have the power to require disclosure of information on personal devices during litigation, and data subjects are entitled to all personal data held about them in any format, unless an exemption applies.

When using social media, be mindful that if your online profile references Social Work England, or you can be identified (even through triangulation of your identity) as a representative of Social Work England, then your behaviour online reflects on the organisation, whatever the subject.

Social Work England holds a special role as a public service, with a close relationship with the profession and our other stakeholders. Social workers and members of the public should be able to have confidence in the organisation, and should not be wary of using our service, or being regulated by us, because of online comments or behaviour of Social Work England staff.

As an organisation, we recognise that the Human Rights Act 1998 sets out the right to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence and the right to hold opinions and express them freely, however these rights are not absolute.

We expect our people to respect other people's rights and to conduct themselves responsibly and in a manner which mirrors how we would expect social workers to behave, in line with the professional standards.

The simple rule to remember is that the principles covering the use of social media are the same as those that apply for any other form of communication. Social media is a public forum, and the same considerations apply as, say, to speaking in public or writing for a publication either officially or out of work. On social media the boundaries between professional and personal can become blurred – so it's important to be particularly careful.

Again, this is especially true for 'public facing' teams such as the regional engagement leads and other services where our people are, or can be, identifiable as Social Work England employees. We must continue to act with integrity, impartiality and honesty so that we live up to the standards expected of a public body that exists to protect the public.

Staff who are regulated professionals should also have regard to any requirements set by their professional regulator and should abide by their own professional obligations.

Social Work England has core values, and operates a commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). We expect staff to conduct themselves in their personal lives in a way which respects these values and respects EDI. Social media posting which breaks this commitment is likely to bring the organisation into disrepute and may form the basis of disciplinary proceedings.

If concerns are raised about your activity on social media, your manager will normally seek to discuss this with you before considering whether any disciplinary action is required.

Social Work England is more likely to consider disciplinary action in respect of social media posts which:

- demonstrate, or allude to, illegal behaviour;
- undermine the work of Social Work England;
- are discriminatory against people, based on any protected characteristic
- breach confidentiality or otherwise comment on cases dealt with by Social Work England;
- are dishonest or deceptive (such as impersonating another person);
- are abusive or threatening, or likely to cause significant harm, distress or offence to a person;
- bully, harass or victimise a person;
- show a pattern of frequent or many concerning communications;
- ignore previous advice or warnings about concerns.

Social Work England is less likely to start disciplinary investigations about social media posts that:

- are part of debates about positions or perspectives, rather than relating directly to individuals or specific organisations;
- use professional and respectful language; and
- are removed if requested to do so by their line manager.

Further support

If you'd like further support with using social media or want to learn more, speak to one of the Communications team through the socialmedia@socialworkengland.org.uk email.

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