

# LEARNING AND SKILLS SERVICE

# SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

## 1. Definition

Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) is a broad term for any kind of online platform which enables people to directly interact with each other. However, some games, for example Minecraft or World of Warcraft and video sharing platforms such as You Tube have social media elements to them.

The Learning and Skills Service recognises the numerous benefits and opportunities which a social media presence offers. Staff and learners are actively encouraged to find creative ways to use social media. However, there are some risks associated with social media use, especially around the issues of safeguarding, bullying and personal reputation. This policy aims to encourage the safe use of social media by the Learning and Skills Service, its staff, learners and family learning children.

## 2. Scope

This policy is subject to The Learning and Skills Service Codes of Conduct and Acceptable Use Agreements.

This policy:

- Applies to all staff and to all online communications which directly or indirectly, represent the Learning and Skills Service.
- Applies to such online communications posted at any time and from anywhere.
- Encourages the safe and responsible use of social media through training and education.
- Defines the monitoring of public social media activity pertaining to The Learning and Skills Service.

Learning and Skills Service respects privacy and understands that staff and learners may use social media forums in their private lives. However, personal communications likely to have a negative impact on professional standards and/or The Learning and Skills Service's reputation are within the scope of this policy.

Professional communications are those made through official channels, posted on a Learning and Skills Service accounts or using The Learning and Skills Service name. All professional communications are within the scope of this policy.

Personal communications are those made via a personal social media account. In all cases, where a personal account is used which associates itself with the Learning and Skills Service or impacts on the Learning and Skills Service, it must be made clear that the member of staff is not communicating on behalf of the Learning and Skills Service with an appropriate disclaimer. Such personal communications are within the scope of this policy.

Personal communications which do not refer to or impact upon the Learning and Skills Service are outside the scope of this policy.

Digital communications with Learners are also considered. Staff may use social media to communicate with learners via a Learning and Skills Service social media account for teaching and learning purposes but must consider whether this is appropriate and consider the potential implications.

### **3. Organisational control**

#### **Roles & Responsibilities**

##### Senior Leadership Team

- Facilitating training and guidance on Social Media use.
- Developing and implementing the Social Media policy
- Taking a lead role in investigating any reported incidents.
- Making an initial assessment when an incident is reported and involving appropriate staff and external agencies as required.
- Receive completed applications for Social Media accounts.
- Approve account creation.

##### Administrator / Moderator

- Create the account following SLT approval.
- Store account details, including passwords securely.
- Be involved in monitoring and contributing to the account.
- Control the process for managing an account after the lead staff member has left the organisation (closing or transferring).

## Staff

- Know the contents of and ensure that any use of social media is carried out in line with this and other relevant policies.
- Attending appropriate training.
- Regularly monitoring, updating and managing content he/she has posted via Learning and Skills Service accounts.
- Adding an appropriate disclaimer to personal accounts when naming the Learning and Skills Service.

## 4. Process for creating new accounts

The Learning and Skills Service is encouraged to consider if a social media account will help them in their work. Anyone wishing to create such an account must present a business case to the Leadership Team which covers the following points:

- The aim of the account
- The intended audience
- How the account will be promoted
- Who will run the account?
- Will the account be open or private/closed

Following consideration by the SLT an application will be approved or rejected. In all cases, the SLT must be satisfied that anyone running a social media account on behalf of the Learning and Skills Service has read and understood this policy and received appropriate training. This also applies to anyone who is not directly employed by the Learning and Skills Service such as volunteers.

## 5. Monitoring

The Learning and Skills Service accounts must be monitored regularly and frequently (preferably 7 days a week, including during holidays). Any comments, queries or complaints made through those accounts must be responded to within 24 hours (or on the next working day if received at a weekend) even if the response is only to acknowledge receipt. Regular monitoring and intervention is essential in case a situation arises where bullying or any other inappropriate behaviour arises on a Learning and Skills Service social media account.

## **6. Behaviour**

The Learning and Skills Service requires that all users using social media adhere to the standard of behaviour as set out in this policy and other relevant policies.

Digital communications by staff must be professional and respectful at all times and in accordance with this policy. Staff will not use social media to infringe on the rights and privacy of others or make ill-considered comments or judgments about staff. Learning and Skills Service social media accounts must not be used for personal gain. Staff must ensure that confidentiality is maintained on social media even after they leave the employment of the Learning and Skills Service.

Users must declare who they are in social media posts or accounts. Anonymous posts are discouraged in relation to Learning and Skills Service activity.

If a journalist makes contact about posts made using social media staff must follow The Learning and Skills Service media policy and wider Sunderland City Council Policy before responding.

Unacceptable conduct, (e.g. defamatory, discriminatory, offensive, harassing content or a breach of data protection, confidentiality, copyright) will be considered extremely seriously by the Learning and Skills Service and will be reported as soon as possible to a relevant senior member of staff, and escalated where appropriate.

The use of social media by staff while at work may be monitored, in line with Sunderland City Council policies. The Sunderland Council permits reasonable and appropriate access to private social media sites. However, where excessive use is

suspected, and considered to be interfering with relevant duties, disciplinary action may be taken

The Learning and Skills Service will take appropriate action in the event of breaches of the social media policy. Where conduct is found to be unacceptable, Learning and Skills Service will deal with the matter internally. Where conduct is considered illegal, Learning and Skills Service will report the matter to the police and other relevant external agencies, and may take action according to the disciplinary policy.

## **7 Legal Considerations**

Users of social media should consider the copyright of the content they are sharing and, where necessary, should seek permission from the copyright holder before sharing.

Users must ensure that their use of social media does not infringe upon relevant data protection laws, or breach confidentiality.

## **8 Handling abuse**

When acting on behalf of The Learning and Skills Service, handle offensive comments swiftly and with sensitivity.

If a conversation turns and becomes offensive or unacceptable, Learning and Skills Service users should block, report or delete other users or their comments/posts and should inform the audience exactly why the action was taken

If you feel that you or someone else is subject to abuse by colleagues through use of a social networking site, then this action must be reported using the agreed Learning and Skills Service protocols.

## **9 Tone**

The tone of content published on social media should be appropriate to the audience, whilst retaining appropriate levels of professional standards. Key words to consider when composing messages are:

- Engaging
- Conversational
- Informative
- Friendly (on certain platforms, e.g. Facebook)

## 10 Use of images

The Learning and Skills Service use of images can be assumed to be acceptable, providing the following guidelines are strictly adhered to:

- Permission to use any photos or video recordings should be sought in line with the Photo consent forms. If anyone, for any reason, asks not to be filmed or photographed then their wishes should be respected.
- Staff should exercise their professional judgement about whether an image is appropriate to share on Learning and Skills Service social media accounts. Learners should be appropriately dressed, not be subject to ridicule.
- If a member of staff inadvertently takes a compromising picture which could be misconstrued or misused, they must delete it immediately.

## 11 Personal use

### Staff

- Personal communications are those made via a personal social media account. In all cases, where a personal account is used which associates itself with the Learning and Skills Service or impacts on the Learning and Skills Service, it must be made clear that the member of staff is not communicating on behalf of the Learning and Skills Service with an appropriate disclaimer. Such personal communications are within the scope of this policy.
- Personal communications which do not refer to or impact upon The Learning and Skills Service are outside the scope of this policy.
- Where excessive personal use of social media in Learning and Skills Service is suspected, and considered to be interfering with relevant duties, disciplinary action may be taken.

- Learning and Skills Service permits reasonable and appropriate access to private social media sites.

### **Learners**

- Staff are not permitted to follow or engage with current or prior learners of The Learning and Skills Service on any personal social media network account.
- Learners are encouraged to comment or post appropriately about The Learning and Skills Service. Any offensive or inappropriate comments will be resolved by the use of the Sunderland City Council's Code of Conduct.

### **Monitoring posts about the LEARNING AND SKILLS SERVICE**

- As part of active social media engagement, it is considered good practice to proactively monitor the Internet for public postings about The Learning and Skills Service.
- The Learning and Skills Service should effectively respond to social media comments made by others according to a defined policy or process.

## **12 Appendix**

Managing your personal use of Social Media:

- “Nothing” on social media is truly private
- Social media can blur the lines between your professional and private life. Don't use the Learning and Skills Service logo and/or branding on personal accounts
- Check your settings regularly and test your privacy
- Keep an eye on your digital footprint
- Keep your personal information private
- Regularly review your connections – keep them to those you want to be connected to
- When posting online consider; Scale, Audience and Permanency of what you post
- If you want to criticise, do it politely
- Take control of your images – do you want to be tagged in an image? What would children or parents say about you if they could see your images?



- Know how to report a problem

### **13 Managing Learning and Skills Service social media accounts**

#### **The Do's**

- Check with a senior leader before publishing content that may have controversial implications for The Learning and Skills Service
- Use a disclaimer when expressing personal views
- Make it clear who is posting content
- Use an appropriate and professional tone
- Be respectful to all parties
- Ensure you have permission to 'share' other peoples' materials and acknowledge the author
- Express opinions but do so in a balanced and measured manner
- Think before responding to comments and, when in doubt, get a second opinion
- Seek advice and report any mistakes using The Learning and Skills Service's reporting process
- Consider turning off tagging people in images where possible

#### **The Don'ts**

- Don't make comments, post content or link to materials that will bring The Learning and Skills Service into disrepute
- Don't publish confidential or commercially sensitive material
- Don't breach copyright, data protection or other relevant legislation
- Consider the appropriateness of content for any audience of Learning and Skills Service accounts, and don't link to, embed or add potentially inappropriate content
- Don't post derogatory, defamatory, offensive, harassing or discriminatory content
- Don't use social media to air internal grievances

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