



TRINITY COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY of OXFORD

Social Media Policy and Guidance

Social media can bring enormous benefits and opportunities. However, it also brings with it significant risks. The central University has developed social media guidance for students, which you should familiarise yourself with: [University Social Media Guidance for Students](#)

College social media guidance – general principles

Social media can bring enormous benefits and opportunities to an academic community, including by enabling global communication and collaboration and promoting healthy and lively academic debate.

There is, however, an inherent risk involved in using social media, in that it is an instantaneous and far-reaching form of communication and inappropriate use has the potential to cause serious, and sometimes unexpected and long-term, consequences.

We encourage you to engage, collaborate and innovate through social media; however, wherever and however you do this, you must be aware of the potential impact on you and other users.

What is social media?

Social media is any online interactive tool which encourages participation, interaction and exchanges, such as blogs, discussion forums, instant messaging and any website that allows public commenting or posting. Current popular platforms include Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Vine and Twitter.

Freedom of speech

Freedom of speech and academic freedom are central tenets of college and university life, including in a social media context, and nothing in this guidance is intended to compromise these fundamental freedoms. Please refer to the [College Handbook](#) and its Free Speech Statement (p.78-80) for the College's definition and policy regarding free speech.

Online etiquette

When using social media it can be tempting to speak and act in a way we wouldn't face-to-face. Remember that innocently intended comments posted online are more easily misconstrued, as online writing can lack the nuances of face-to-face interaction. Consider when posting online:

- Who is the audience for your post? Will it be limited to close friends and family or could it be read by the wider public? Could it be seen by people you have, or might one day have, a professional relationship with?
- What style should you be using? Remember that in most cases, content you post will be public, it may not be possible to remove it at a later date and it could be reposted or shared through other forms of social media.
- Think twice about how you post content if you're feeling angry about something and consider the effect that this might have on the situation. If you're responding to someone else's post ask yourself whether you are sure that you have read the post in the way in which it was intended. Your response could just escalate a situation.

College and University Guidelines and Regulations

The College Code of Conduct

Using social media to post offensive or abusive comments, images or other content may constitute a breach of the Trinity Code of Conduct and could result in disciplinary action by the Dean. This could include:

- Serious misconduct including harassment or bullying
- Accessing, downloading or storing inappropriate material

Please consult the [Code of Conduct](#) in the College Handbook (p.27 onwards) for details of the Code of Conduct.

The University Code of Discipline

Using social media to post offensive comments, images or other content may be a breach of the Code of Discipline under Statute XI and could result in disciplinary action by the Proctors.

Such material could constitute:

- "harassment" under Section 2(m) of the Code of Discipline, as defined in the University's Harassment Policy
- a breach of section 2(h) of the Code of Discipline: engaging in "violent, indecent disorderly, threatening or offensive behaviour or language".

Social Media and Professional Courses

In addition, if you are taking a course which will result in a professional qualification (such as teaching, medicine or law) you may have to meet standards of behaviour set by the national professional body or by an institution you are working for (eg a school for students on the PGCE), or by the University under the Fitness to Practice or Fitness to Teach regulations.

These rules may expect you to uphold the reputation of the profession, or of an institution and so may cover a very broad range of conduct, including conduct which would otherwise be acceptable. An example could be a PGCE student posting criticism on Facebook about the partnership school he or she had been placed with. Content you post on social media could result in you being in breach of these rules and if serious could result in you losing the opportunity to pursue your chosen profession.

[IT Regulations](#) – this page from IT Services contains links to all of the University's Regulations, Information and Guidance relating to the use of University IT and communications facilities, which may also be applicable when it comes to social media and online content.

Civil and/or Criminal Action

In addition to college and University codes of conduct which cover online activity, various civil and criminal laws apply to content posted online:

- Civil claims that could be brought include actions for defamation, harassment, breach of intellectual property rights, fraudulent misrepresentation or breach of confidence.
- Criminal offences that could occur online include harassment, stalking, hate crimes, coercive or controlling behaviour, disclosing private sexual images without consent, blackmail, malicious communications and terrorism offences.

Intellectual Property

Be careful not to infringe copyright by posting others' content online (photographs, text, videos, music etc) without ensuring that you have permission to do this, including by checking the terms of any licence – for example, you may need to credit the author and/or link to the licence. Remember:

- If you are posting an image of a logo or trademark, always check that you have permission to do this. You may have the photographer or designer's permission, but not necessarily that of the owner of the logo/trademark.
- You should also consider checking the terms and conditions of social media accounts and/or websites before uploading material as by doing so you may be releasing ownership rights and control of content.

Confidentiality

Posting confidential material online without permission is potentially a breach of data protection as well as college and university privacy rules.

Confidential material can include personal confidential information about an individual or information which is confidential for professional reasons, including:

- trade secrets
- confidential research data
- personal information about another individual (such as information about their medical history, or sexuality)
- details of complaints and/or legal proceedings

Relationships with the College

The College is not responsible for, and does not hold any ownership of, any content posted on social media by its students.

When posting online there may be circumstances in which you risk giving the impression that you are speaking on behalf of the college or university. If in doubt, you should consider adding a disclaimer to make it clear that you are posting in a personal capacity.

How to Complain About Social Media Content

If you are concerned about material another student or member of staff has published on social media you should consider the following options:

- Firstly, speaking to the individual concerned directly, if you feel that it is safe to do so
- Taking informal steps to resolve the situation
- If the above steps are unsuccessful, making a formal complaint

The appropriate informal steps, and the route for making a formal complaint will vary depending on what kind of content you are complaining about and the context in which it occurred. Complaints about social media posts made by a student or member of staff in college should follow the complaints procedure (laid out in the [College Handbook](#) p.77-78).

Complaints about posts amounting to harassment should follow the procedure set out in the College or University's Harassment Policy:

- Complaints against college students or staff should follow the College's [Policy and Procedure on Harassment](#);
- Complaints against members of staff or students outside college should follow the [University Harassment Policy and Procedure](#), which provides that initial advice can be sought from the Director of Student Welfare and Support Services and that Complaints against staff are decided by the Head of Department, while Complaints against students are decided by the Proctors.