



The **ROYAL COLLEGE** of
OPHTHALMOLOGISTS

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

A guide for trustees, committee members and staff on using social media to promote the work of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists and in a personal capacity.

This policy will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, every two years. We will amend this policy, following consultation, where appropriate.

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Introduction

What is social media?

Social media is the term given to web-based tools and applications that enable users to create and share content – words, images and video – and network with each other by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and common interests. Examples of social media include X (Twitter), LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram.

Why do we use social media?

Social media is a key communications tool for the College. It enables us to engage with our audience, participate in relevant conversations and raise the profile of our work.

Why do we need a social media policy?

The difference between a personal and professional opinion can be blurred on social media, particularly if you're discussing issues relating to the College or our work. While we encourage the use of social media, we have certain standards, outlined in this policy, that we require everyone to observe. Publication and commentary on social media carry similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary in the public domain.

This policy is intended for all College staff, trustees and volunteers and applies to content posted on both a College-owned device and a personal device. Before engaging in work-related social media activity, staff must read this policy.

Setting out the social media policy

This policy sets out guidelines on how social media should be used to support the delivery and promotion of the College, and the use of social media by staff, trustees and volunteers in both a professional and personal capacity. It sets out what you need to be aware of when interacting in these spaces and is designed to help you support our official social media channels, while protecting the College and its reputation and preventing any legal issues.

Internet access and monitoring usage

There are currently no access restrictions to any of our social media sites in the College. However, when using the internet at work, it is important that staff refer to our Staff Handbook, which says 'The use of social networking sites for personal use during working hours is not permitted, however you may go on social networking sites during your breaks.'

Point of contact for social media

Our Communications team is responsible for the day-to-day publishing, monitoring and management of our social media channels. If you have specific questions about any aspect of these channels, please speak to the Communications team. No other staff member can post content on the College's official channels.

Which social media channels do we use?

The College uses the following social media channels:

- LinkedIn – to connect with members and other organisations and individuals with interests in the ophthalmology and associated specialties. Our posts promote achievements and activities that demonstrate expertise and leadership, highlight the benefits of College membership, and publicise volunteering opportunities and staff vacancies.
- X (Twitter) – to start or continue conversations and relationships with individuals working or interested in the ophthalmology specialty. Our posts demonstrate our expertise, promote achievements, and spotlight members.
- Facebook – we have previously used Facebook to contribute to member communities. This is no longer proving effective. We are not actively using Facebook and are considering the longer-term future of the College's account.

Guidelines on appropriate conduct

Using and engaging with the College's social media channels

The Communications team is responsible for setting up and managing the College's social media channels. Only those authorised to do so by the Head of Communications and Engagement will have access to these accounts.

If staff outside of the Communications team wish to contribute content for College social media, whether free or paid for advertising, they should speak to the team about this.

We monitor our social media channels during UK office hours: Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm. In specific circumstances, such as during a crisis or key event, we may monitor them during evenings and weekends.

College values should be reflected in all posts about the College.

We ensure that all social media content has a purpose and a benefit for the College and accurately reflects our strategic aims.

We aim to bring value to our audiences, to answer their questions, help and engage with them.

We aim to reply to comments in a timely and respectful manner, when a response is appropriate.

We make every effort to incorporate digital safeguarding best practice in all our social media activity. We will not tolerate abuse and will take necessary action if it occurs.

We take care with the presentation of content to ensure it is inclusive and accessible and we check to make sure that there are no typos, misspellings or grammatical errors. We also check the quality of images.

If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify a child or young person, we will ensure we have the appropriate consent of a parent or guardian prior to publication.

We will not encourage others to risk their personal safety or that of others to gather materials. For example, a video of a stunt.

We will not encourage people to break the law to supply material for social media, such as using unauthorised video footage. We will ensure we obtain all relevant rights for usage before publishing material.

The College is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. We have every right to express views on policy, including the policies of parties, but we cannot tell people how to vote.

If a complaint is made on the College's social media channels, the Communications team staff will consult with the Head of Communications and Engagement and any relevant department heads to agree an organisational response, in line with our [Complaints Process](#).

Sometimes issues can arise on social media that can escalate into a crisis because they are sensitive or risk serious damage to the College's reputation. The nature of social media means that complaints are visible and can escalate quickly. Not acting can be detrimental to the College.

The Communications team regularly monitors our social media spaces for mentions of the College so we can catch any issues or problems early. If there is an issue that could develop or has already developed into a crisis, the Communications team will lead on an issue or crisis management plan.

Trustees, staff and volunteers are encouraged to engage with (like, comment, reshare etc.) the College's social media posts. This provides a human voice and raises our profile, and helps boost the reach of our messaging. However, when doing so they should refrain from offering personal opinions that conflict with College positions. If you are in doubt about the College's position on a particular issue, please speak to the Policy team.

Trustees, staff and volunteers should not set up groups, pages, accounts or any other social media channels on behalf of the College or any College committee. This could confuse messaging and brand awareness and dilute our impact. By having official social media accounts in place, the Communications team can ensure consistency of the brand and focus on building a strong following and narrative.

If any trustee, volunteer or member of staff outside of the Communications team becomes aware of any comments online that they think have the potential to escalate into a crisis, whether on the College's social media channels or elsewhere, they should speak to the Head of Communications and Engagement immediately.

Using personal social media accounts

This policy does not intend to inhibit personal use of social media but instead flags up those areas in which conflicts might arise. College trustees, staff and volunteers are expected to behave appropriately, and in ways that are consistent with College values, both online and in real life.

Doctors should refer to the General Medical Council's guidance on [Using social media as a medical professional](#).

We recommend that social media users always pause and think before posting.

It is good practice to always check facts. You should not automatically assume that material is accurate and should take reasonable steps where necessary to seek verification, for example, by checking data/statistics, using a reputable fact checking tool and being wary of photo manipulation.

Be honest. Say what you know to be true or have a good source for. If you have made a mistake, do not be afraid to admit it.

Be aware that any information you make public could affect how people perceive the College. You must make it clear when you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the College. If you are using your personal social media accounts to promote and talk about the College's work, you must use a disclaimer such as: "The views expressed on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the College's positions, policies or opinions" or "Opinions are my own and not the views of the College." Retweeting content can reasonably be perceived as endorsing it and you should be cautious of sharing information that could be inaccurate.

College staff and members should not post content about members without their express permission. If staff, members or trustees are sharing information about members or third-party organisations, this content should be clearly labelled so our audiences know it has not come directly from the College.

Those in senior and specialist roles where they are well known in their field of expertise, must take particular care as personal views published may be misunderstood as expressing the College's view.

Use common sense and good judgement. Be aware of your association with the College and ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself.

If a trustee, staff member or volunteer is contacted by the press about their social media posts that relate to the College, they should talk to the Communications team immediately and under no circumstances respond directly.

Never use College logos or trademarks unless approved to do so. Permission to use logos should be requested from the Communications team.

Always protect yourself and the College. Be careful with your privacy online and be cautious when sharing personal information. Your published content is widely accessible and will be around for a long time, so do consider the content carefully.

Think about your reputation as well as the College's. Express your opinions and deal with differences of opinion respectfully. Do not insult people or treat them badly. Passionate discussions and debates are fine, but you should always be respectful of others and their opinions. Be polite and the first to correct your own mistakes.

Safeguarding and dealing with abuse

We will not tolerate abuse on our social media sites. Comments that use offensive or abusive language will be muted or removed, and may be reported. Accounts that repeatedly mention or tag the College in such posts will be blocked.

Further guidelines

Libel

Libel is when a false written statement that is damaging to a person's reputation is published online or in print. Whether you are posting content on social media as part of your job or in a personal capacity, you should not bring the College into disrepute by making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups.

Copyright law

It is critical that we abide by the laws governing copyright, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. Never use or adapt someone else's images or written content without permission. Failing to acknowledge the source/author/resource citation, where permission has been given to reproduce content, is also considered a breach of copyright.

Confidentiality

Any communications that members or staff make in a personal capacity must not breach confidentiality. For example, information meant for internal use only or information that the College is not ready to disclose yet, such as a news story that is embargoed for a particular date.

The General Medical Council offers guidance on respecting patient confidentiality, privacy and dignity [here](#).

Discrimination and harassment

You should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, on either an official College social media channel or a personal account. For example:

- making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief
- using social media to bully another individual
- posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content.

Lobbying Act

Charities are legally allowed to campaign to bring about a change in policy or law to further their organisational purpose. In most cases, spending on charity campaigns that are in accordance with charity law will not be regulated under electoral law. However, the Lobbying Act, which was passed in January 2014, states that during national elections (known as regulated periods) spending on campaigning activities may be regulated.

Charities that spend more than £20,000 in England or £10,000 in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, during the regulated period, need to register with the Electoral Commission. To abide by the Lobbying Act, campaigning activities on social media must not be seen as intending to influence people's voting choice.

Use of social media in the recruitment process

Recruitment should be carried out in accordance with relevant associated procedures and guidelines. Any advertising of vacancies should be done through HR. College staff and volunteering vacancies are shared routinely on LinkedIn and Twitter/X.

There should be no systematic or routine checking of candidate's online social media activities during the recruitment process, as conducting these searches might lead to a presumption that an applicant's protected characteristics, such as religious beliefs or sexual orientation, played a part in a recruitment decision. This is in line with EDI best practice.

Protection and intervention

The responsibility for measures of protection and intervention lies first with the social networking site itself. Different social networking sites offer different models of interventions in different areas. For more information, refer to the guidance available on the social networking site itself. However, if a staff member considers that a person/people is/are at risk of harm, they should report this to the Head of People and Resources immediately.

Responsibilities and breach of policy

Everyone is responsible for their own compliance with this policy. Participation in social media on behalf of the College is not a right but an opportunity, so it must be treated seriously and with respect.

For both members and staff, breaches of policy may incur disciplinary action, depending on the severity of the issue. Anyone who is unsure about whether something they propose to do on social media might breach this policy should seek advice from the Head of Communication and Engagement.

Please refer to our [Staff Handbook](#) for further information on staff disciplinary procedures.

Please refer to our [Complaints policy](#) for further information on how complaints about conduct are handled, and how they can be reported.

Doctors are advised to follow the good practice outlined in the General Medical Council guidance, [Using social media as a medical professional](#).