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**Social media guidelines for staff and students**

All staff and students who use social media to communicate professionally should follow the [University of Oxford social media guidelines](https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/life/it/socialmedia?wssl=1). Please also refer to the [Medical Sciences social media guidelines](https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/life/it/socialmedia?wssl=1).

This document is intended to further inform and provide guidance for staff and students using social media in a professional capacity. It offers practical advice on using different social media and is a guide to doing so as a voice and representative of the Nuffield Department of Surgical Sciences. It highlights areas of risk and sets out the framework that as a member of Oxford University you should operate within.

Social media can include:

* Social networking sites
* Blogs
* Forums
* Micro-blogging
* Photo sharing
* Social bookmarking
* Wikis
* Virtual worlds
* Instant messenger

Louise King, NDS Communications and Public Engagement Officer, is always happy to advise on any social media questions. Contact email louise.king@nds.ox.ac.uk

**Why use social media?**

* To engage with other users
* To share your news and connect with those interested in your work
* To create interest and excitement in what you’re doing
* To create a sense of community with students, staff and other stakeholders
* To get involved in conversations with people already talking about you
* To communicate through media that in most cases incurs no cost
* To inspire prospective students about possible destinations by engaging in conversations and networking with alumni
* To join a growing community of departments, schools, research groups, institutes, academics and students who are already using social media at Oxford.

It is important to consider **why** you want to use social media and how it fits into your wider communication aims. Using social media for the sake of it, or because it is increasingly popular, is not sufficient. It might not always be the best way of communicating with *your* key audiences.

Consider whether you have the staff resources to maintain a social media presence. All profiles require regular updates to ensure they are useful and engaging for both the profile-holder and the users.

**What to do with social media**

Effective management of social media platforms can provide low-cost engagement with key audiences. For example:

*A department could*

* Promote its news, research developments, events and appointments
* Connect with others doing similar work
* Give information on module choices
* Answer questions from current and prospective students - acting as a virtual helpdesk – actively searching online for mentions of the department/services and being seen to troubleshoot and engage in problem solving
* Give information on application details and deadlines to prospective students

*A research group/centre could*

* Provide a place for staff, students and third parties to discuss its work and promote its research
* Connect with key influencers

*An academic could*

* Connect with other individuals and organisations in similar fields
* Share ideas about their research
* Comment on developments in their area

There is no fixed way of using social media, or even particular platforms, so while it’s good to have a clear understanding about why you are using it, you can – and should – experiment.

**Audience**

Whatever your reason for using social media anyone can engage with you and you are likely to attract multiple audiences. If you are making a general department profile there is little control over who will connect with you. Bear in mind the many potential audiences when posting content. These may include:

* Current students
* Current staff
* Prospective students
* Prospective staff
* The media
* Alumni
* Opinion formers and policy makers
* Funding bodies
* Colleagues within Higher Education
* The local community
* Businesses
* Government
* Donors

**Best practice tips**

*Be engaging*

Have a “voice” - develop a personality for your feed. Create exciting content and be enthusiastic about it. Don’t just give news updates about your department (this is known as ‘pushing’ content, where information is forced on users in a one-way direction and there is no opportunity for dialogue). A strength of social media is the ease with which you can connect with other users.

If you are asked a question respond promptly and politely, as you would to an email or phone call. If you can’t answer directly, give suggestions or guidance on where the information might be available.

Accept that comments or questions posted will not always be positive. Be prepared for users expressing negative opinions or asking difficult questions. These can be turned into opportunities for positive communication.

*Connect with people and organisations*

Follow and connect with other organisations and individuals using social media who are relevant to your field and are of interest to you. For example, alumni, charities, MPs, departments at other universities, think-tanks or funding bodies. Social media offers alternative channels to connect with a huge range of people and groups.

*Get involved*

Social media is about communicating and being sociable – respond to others’ tweets and Facebook messages and link to or retweet exciting content from other users.

*Correct errors*

As you are publishing on a public platform it is important to avoid factual errors. If you do make a mistake correct it quickly and make it clear to your users that you have done so. Do not delete or attempt to hide the mistake as this is likely to be noticed.

*Disclaimers*

If you have a profile as an individual, but are engaging and uploading content within your role at Oxford, it is advisable to have a ‘views are my own’ disclaimer. These are commonly seen on Twitter profiles and can help avoid confusion if you are also posting content in a personal capacity, or content not directly related to your professional role. Professional boundaries should be respected and it is advisable to separate very personal and professional content online. It is important to recognise that material you post and your online activity may negatively affect your reputation, and that of the department and the University, and can have further consequences.

*Be transparent*

When posting content be transparent about who you are. If you attempt to hide your identity, or claim to be someone else, there is a good chance of being found out. This can cause a backlash from users who may then challenge the authenticity of what you are saying and can have damaging consequences for your reputation.

*Update frequently*

A rarely updated profile serves no purpose. It is not necessary to update daily, but nor is it acceptable to leave a profile or feed empty for weeks.

If you find a profile is not being used as much as you anticipated, close it down rather than leave it. If the individual who runs the profile leaves the department ensure they handover all the necessary login and password details.

**Tone**

The tone of the language you use should be consistent. It should be friendly, vibrant and approachable. Expression and language should convey personality and create a clear “voice” for your department or group. Avoid flat, dull language and engage with your audience at their level – even if the profile is not that of an individual, people will still respond to a tone that suggests they are interacting with another person, not a machine.

**Do**

* Always be polite. Be aware some users may be rude to you - don’t let the language you use antagonise a situation
* Ensure a lay audience can understand you
* Be friendly
* Always remain professional in your responses, posts and comments
* Only post comments/content you are happy for *anybody* to read

**Don’t**

* Be too excited with lots of exclamation marks or capital letters
* Speak as casually as you would using your own personal profile
* Be too serious or formal

Social media platforms

There is an ever-increasing array of social media platforms. Here are a few of the most commonly used:

**Facebook**

*Setting up a Facebook Page* - [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

- There are no restrictions on what you can name a Facebook page. However, you cannot change it afterwards, so think carefully when choosing.

- Always use an image, relevant to your department, in the profile picture box.

- Add a description, with links to the department website, alongside contact details including an email and phone number.

- Departments are advised to set up a Facebook ‘page’, rather than a ‘group’. Pages allow users to become your ‘fans’, to post on the wall and contribute to the discussion. ‘Groups’ are more suited to smaller discussion groups, such as those taking a particular module on a course.

*How to use Facebook:*

- Facebook pages allow you to post a status, links, pictures and videos, which all of your followers (and anyone else who happens to look at the page) will see on your feed.

- Users can post on your ‘wall’ and might pose questions which either you, or other users, can answer and comment on.

- Seek out related Oxford Facebook pages and ‘like’ them. This helps create a united network for users and makes it easier to see their content. Make sure, however, that these are relevant and beneficial to you and your users.

*Possible content* (for a department for example)

* Post links to your department news and events
* Update your status with internal department news such as when module results are available
* Invite users to post photos relevant to the department, such as images of their research projects, presentations or events
* Reply to student enquiries and contribute to discussions

**Twitter**

*Setting up a Twitter profile* – [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

- Use a sensible name for your ‘username’ (which is always preceded by ‘@’ and cannot include spaces) such as ‘NDSurgicalSci’. You also need to enter a normal ‘name’: include the full name of the department or group such as ‘Nuffield Department of Surgical Sciences’.

- Always add a profile picture. Leaving the default image makes the profile look unused and unprofessional. This could be a logo appropriate to your department.

- Always have a description of your department or group. You can include a contact email address.

*How to use Twitter - some basics*:

- Twitter allows you to post 280 character ‘tweets’ to your profile. You can also reply to other tweets, post links and pictures and connect to conversations.

- ‘Retweeting’, where you post someone else’s tweet on your profile, means their message appears on your feed to your followers. This can be done by clicking the retweet logo on every tweet ().

- A ‘hashtag’ is a word with a # next to it, such as #news. Using a hashtag in your tweet connects your message to all other tweets with that word, making it searchable. It is used to connect a theme, event or conversation e.g. ‘Just seen Professor Jones from Oxford on #newsnight’.

- You can refer to other users by putting an ‘@’ then typing their name, such as ‘@UniofOxford’. For example: ‘Just been to a great seminar @UniofOxford’.

- If you are linking to a website, you might like to use a url shortner, as you only have 280 characters and web addresses tend to be quite long. These reduce the length of the url considerably and allow you to use the rest of the tweet for words. One of the main websites for this is <http://bitly.com/>.

- When using Twitter to communicate with an internal audience always remember that your post is visible to an external audience as well. Twitter is not a closed network and therefore content can be seen by all other users.

*Possible content:*

* Post links to your department news and events
* Post links to relevant developments in your area which could include articles in the press
* Post live updates to events, a debate or VIP visit to the department/University
* Respond to enquiries from others in public
* Post photos using a mobile device and Twitter - all smartphones allow you to use Twitter, so you can update while mobile

**Who will you reach?**

Virtually all students use Facebook and have done so for a number of years. Although it is now spreading across all age ranges, it generally attracts a younger audience.

Twitter and Facebook reach slightly different audiences. Twitter is very popular among those interested in technology, the media, politics and current affairs. For example, the majority of MPs use Twitter, as do most think-tanks, research bodies and universities.

As a result, it is not always advisable to replicate content between your Facebook account and Twitter profile.

Facebook content should be more focused on current and prospective students, for example welcoming students back from holidays, updates about exam results and general department news.

Twitter on the other hand is a good channel for publicising new research, mentioning media appearances, academic comment and linking to other material within your area across the University.

**LinkedIn –** [**www.linkedin.com**](http://www.linkedin.com)

- LinkedIn has an older demographic than Twitter or Facebook and is generally used by ‘professionals’.

- In a university context it is mainly used for a department, and especially alumni, group pages.

- In order to set up a LinkedIn group you must first create an individual profile. Then click on ‘create a group’ and select the type you want.

*How to use a LinkedIn group:*

- LinkedIn acts as a forum, with users joining a group and posting questions, links or comments to the wall or discussions.

- Unlike other social networks, the moderators will appear with their real positions and titles, making exchanges potentially more formal.

**Instagram**

Instagram is a simple, fun and creative way to share photos, videos and messages. The NDS Instagram handle is [@nuffieldsurgical](https://www.instagram.com/nuffieldsurgical/). For any questions about Instagram or for more details, contact Louise King.

**YouTube**

Videos are incredibly powerful. They get a good position in Google. The NDS YouTube account is <https://www.youtube.com/user/surgicalsciences>. For any questions about YouTube or for more details, contact Louise King.

**Blogging**

All members of the department are invited to contribute to the [NDS Blog](https://www.nds.ox.ac.uk/news/blog). As with all social media profiles, when blogging bear in mind that you are doing so as a representative of the University even if the blog is on an external website.

**Be part of the Oxford online community**

There are countless departmental/group/centre Twitter feeds at Oxford already in existence, in addition to many Facebook, LinkedIn groups and YouTube channels. When you join a network, connect with them in any way you can. This allows you to share news, receive updates from around the University and share creative ideas and best practice and contribute to the Oxford community.

**Maximise the value of social media by linking your profiles**

* From your department website
* In email signatures
* In newsletters and in hard copy in department publications
* In materials sent to prospective or incoming students
* In external presentations given by staff
* On other social media profiles

You should also link to your department page from any of your social media profiles and to any other social media profiles you have.