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Lancaster University Students' Union: Social Media Policy

1. **Purpose**

- 1.1 This policy is in place to minimise the risks to the organisation through use of social media, whilst recognising that participation in social media is an effective way of building engagement and member trust.
- 1.2 This policy aims to encourage trustees, employees and student volunteers of the organisation to use social media in a positive and influential way, whilst recognising their responsibility to manage and preserve a professional reputation, be respectful to others and adhere to data and privacy obligations.

2. **Scope**

- 2.1 For the purpose of this policy, social media is defined as any online interactive tool which encourages participation, interaction and exchanges. This includes existing platforms and any new applications that emerge as well as blogs, discussion forums, instant messaging and any website which allows public commenting or posting.
- 2.2 This policy provides information to individuals on the appropriate use of social media when working for or representing the organisation, or when directly or indirectly referencing the organisation or any member of the organisation's community.
- 2.3 This policy applies to all employees, trustees and student volunteers who engage in online conversations or share content via social networks.
- 2.4 This policy applies to social media communications made at any time, whether privately or publicly, and from anywhere, including away from campus and on personal devices, whether to an individual, to a limited group or to the world.
- 2.5 It applies to use of social media accounts that are used as part of the organisation's activity, as well as personal social media accounts which can identify the owner as being an employee or volunteer of the organisation.

3. **Principles**

- 3.1 The principles behind the Students' Unions social media policy are derived from three principal sources; The Charities Act 2011, The Lobbying Act 2014(Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014), and Lancaster University Students' Union policies and procedures.
- 3.2 Social networking is a big part of our everyday life and an important way of connecting with our stakeholders and showcasing our work across the sector and beyond. When used properly, it can be a valuable part of our research and insight into stakeholder priorities. It is also a useful transparency and communication tool, so we encourage our employees to take advantage of it.
- 3.3 Whilst we encourage the responsible use of social media, we recognise that any personal social media account which can identify a person as being associated to the organisation also has the potential to harm our professional reputation.

- 3.4 Individuals are personally responsible for what they communicate on or through social media and they must adhere to the standards of behaviour set out in this policy and any related policies.
- 3.5 The organisation is committed to inclusion, so when interacting with people via social media, we respect their views and lived experiences, and treat people online with the same respect and understanding as anyone we meet in person.
- 3.6 Communications on social media must be respectful at all times and in accordance with this policy. Use of social media must not infringe on the rights, dignity or privacy of other employees, trustees or volunteers.
- 3.7 Any misuse of social media will be investigated as part of the organisation's Disciplinary Procedures and may be treated as misconduct.
- 3.8 This policy does not intend to limit freedom of speech, subject to that freedom being used in ways that do not breach the law and/or the organisation's policies or by-laws.

4. Responsibilities

- 4.1 All employees, trustees and volunteers are responsible for:
 - 4.1.1 Ensuring that any use of social media is carried out in line with this and other relevant policies;
 - 4.1.2 Gaining permission before creating an account using the Lancaster University Students' Union and/or the Lancaster University name and logo;
 - 4.1.3 Regularly monitoring, updating and managing the content they have posted;
 - 4.1.4 Ensuring that posts made do not threaten, harass or bully anyone within or outside of the organisation's community;
 - 4.1.5 Reporting any incidents or concerns to an appropriate staff member.

5. Advice and Reporting

- 5.1 If you have any questions, require advice or support, and/or would like to report any breaches or concerns regarding this policy, you can contact an appropriate member of staff as follows: Chris Cottam – Head of Advocacy & Governance – c.cottam1@lancaster.ac.uk
- 5.2 If you notice anything on social media that would breach any of our other policies, for example our Student Members Code of Conduct, Trustee Code of Conduct, Data Protection or Safeguarding policies, please follow the relevant procedures for reporting concerns. This will usually be by speaking to your line manager or another appropriate manager in the first instance, or by following the steps outlined in our Whistleblowing Policy.

6. Guidelines for the responsible use of social media

- 6.1 Employees, trustees or volunteers who have a social media presence that refers to the organisation should ensure that it is clear they are speaking in a personal capacity. You should not declare, imply or indicate that your content or views are representative of those of the organisation.

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- 6.2 The presence of a disclaimer such as *"The views I express are mine alone and do not reflect the views of the organisation"* will not necessarily mean that disciplinary action cannot be taken. We may request the removal of content if it is deemed to pose a risk to one of our employees, trustees or volunteers, or our reputation.
- 6.3 'Liking', 'sharing', 'retweeting' or any other activity that could be seen to endorse social media content that breaches this or any other organisational policies may be regarded in the same way as if the individual had posted the content.
- 6.4 Be respectful to others when making any statement on social media and be aware that you are personally responsible for all communications through social media, which will be published on the internet for anyone to see.
- 6.5 Those in senior management, student leadership roles 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 Lancaster University Students' Union's view.
- 6.6 Use common sense and good judgement. Be aware of your association with Lancaster University Students' Union and ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself to the general public, colleagues, partners and funders.
- 6.7 Lancaster University Students' Union is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. When representing Lancaster University Students' Union, staff are expected to hold Lancaster University Students' Union's position of neutrality. Staff who are politically active in their spare time need to be clear in separating their personal political identity from Lancaster University Students' Union, and understand and avoid potential conflicts of interest.
- 6.8 Social media must not be used to verbally abuse or intimidate staff, trustees, volunteers or members of the public. Respect should be shown at all times for other people's privacy and feelings. Care should be taken to avoid language which may be deemed as offensive to others. For example, you should not:
- 6.8.1 Say anything that is or could be construed as discriminatory;
 - 6.8.2 Engage in any criminal activity;
 - 6.8.3 Make untrue or misleading statements;
 - 6.8.4 Post inappropriate pictures or videos;
 - 6.8.5 Like, share or retweet any content that includes the above.
- 6.9 Before posting photographs, videos or details of another person you must obtain their consent.
- 6.10 Employees must not post disparaging or defamatory statements about the organisation, its staff, trustees or volunteers, suppliers, commercial partners or other stakeholders, as this can damage our business reputation either directly or indirectly.
- 6.11 If you are uncertain or concerned about the appropriateness of any statement or posting, refrain from posting it until you have discussed it with your line manager and/or a member of the Lancaster University Students' Union Communications and Marketing team.
- 6.12 The use of social media channels and other forms of digital communication to bully or harass others, or the posting of inappropriate content that compromises the professional reputation of the organisation may result in disciplinary action.

- 6.13 You must not post comments about sensitive business-related topics, such as our performance, or do anything to jeopardise confidential information or intellectual property. You must not include the organisation's brand in any social media posting or in your profile on any social media unless authorised to do so by a member of the Senior Leadership Team.
- 6.14 The organisation's accounts should not be used to promote or endorse a product unless otherwise agreed by the Chief Executive and/or another appropriate member of the Senior Leadership Team to ensure the organisation remains compliant with our legal obligations and/or any commercial contractual obligations the organisation might have.
- 6.15 If you are contacted for comments for publication anywhere, including social media, the enquiry should be directed to [the Chief Executive at Misbah.ashraf@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:the.Chief.Executive.at.Misbah.ashraf@lancaster.ac.uk) ~~[Shared inbox or named individual?]~~.
- 6.16 Content should not be posted without the permission of the person that created it.
- 6.17 Social media should not be used to gather personal and sensitive data, and/or to share information about other staff, student members, service users, clients or customers in line with our data protection and privacy policies.
- 6.18 Any misuse of social media should be reported to an appropriate staff member.
- 6.19 For support in positively engaging with stakeholders via social media, including details of training, support materials and workshops, please speak to the Students' Union Communications & Marketing team.

7. The organisation's Social Media Accounts

- 7.1 The Students' Union logo should be used on official online channels which are associated with the organisation. This includes student groups or social media accounts established by representatives.
- 7.2 Employees, trustees and student volunteer should be aware that they are representing the organisation when posting comments, liking, sharing or responding to comments made by others on social media.
- 7.3 If an employee, student volunteer or student group needs to create an official organisation social media account, they should contact the Students' Union Communications & Marketing team in the first instance for approval and guidance. This will ensure that agreed accounts are recorded appropriately and that they adhere to naming, brand and visual identity guidelines/protocols.
- 7.4 Any social media accounts used for official purposes should be as far as is practicably possible linked to an organisation email address and the log-in details MUST be provided to the Communications & Marketing team. All engagement with our stakeholders via social media regarding any official activities must be through this account, unless expressly authorised by the Communications & Marketing team.
- 7.5 Accounts established for official purposes remain the property of the Students' Union. Correct, up-to-date log-in details must be shared with the Communications & Marketing team at all times. Upon leaving the organisation, the account will be reassigned or deleted. You should therefore ensure that the account is removed from your personal devices and that any personal details are removed.

8. Abusive behaviour

- 8.1 We want all those working for and representing the organisation to enjoy being praised on social media when they achieve great things.
- 8.2 We will not accept, tolerate or engage with:
 - 8.2.1 Threatening or abusive communications from people who do not agree with our work or approach;
 - 8.2.2 Those working for or representing the organisation being personally attacked because of their gender, race, religion, disability, or any other identifying factor;
 - 8.2.3 Comments being directed to personal social media accounts (i.e., accounts not belonging to the organisation) of those working for or representing the organisation;
 - 8.2.4 Abusive communications via anonymous platforms.
- 8.3 If you are on the receiving end of such abuse, either due to being named directly or because you are monitoring an official organisational social media account, you should not respond. We do however acknowledge that this can still be distressing, and the organisation is committed to supporting you in dealing with online abuse.
- 8.4 If the message is unpleasant but not threatening, and is about work you or the organisation has done, you may wish to respond to ask the person to provide constructive feedback either directly or via our member feedback channels. If the person then continues to be unpleasant or becomes abusive, do not continue the conversation, and instead move to the suggestion below.
- 8.5 If a message feels threatening or abusive, do not respond to it. Instead, you should forward it to a member of the Students' Union Senior Management Team. They will take appropriate action and keep you updated about what they're doing.
- 8.6 The nature of social media means that complaints are visible and can escalate quickly. Sometimes issues can arise on social media which can escalate into a crisis because they are sensitive or risk serious damage to the charity's reputation.
- 8.7 Not acting can be detrimental to the charity. The Communications & Marketing team regularly monitors our social media spaces for mentions of Lancaster University Students Union [and all associated acronyms etc...] so we can catch any issues or problems early. If there is an issue that could develop or has already developed into a crisis situation, the Communications & Marketing team will do the following:
 - 8.7.1 Contact the Head of Advocacy & Governance, or in their absence another member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) immediately with a detailed summary of what has happened. The Communications & Marketing team reserves the right to suspend immediate access of any staff member, trustee or volunteer believed or found to have published inappropriate material.
 - 8.7.2 The SLT lead will conduct an initial risk assessment, and assess the extent to which the matter threatens the organisational reputation or operations, identify if we can handle this internally or need to involve any external stakeholders, and where applicable enact the organisational crisis management plan, ensuring they liaise with the Trustee Board and undertake any associated statutory reporting duties.

8.8 If any staff and/or volunteers outside of the Communications & Marketing team become aware of any comments online that they think have the potential to escalate into a crisis, whether on Lancaster University Students' Union's social media channels or elsewhere, they should speak to the head of Advocacy & Governance, or in their absence another member of the Students' Union Senior Leadership Team immediately.

8.9 All those working for or representing the organisation should know that there is support available to them when they face online abuse, and should speak to their line manager or a member of the Senior Management Team who can signpost them to the relevant support organisations and help them to access tailored support depending on the situation. All line managers will be provided with guidance on how to support employees in these situations.

9. Anonymous Platforms

9.1 The use of anonymous online platforms for the purpose of the bullying, discrimination, harassment, or victimisation of others or to discredit the organisation, its employees, volunteers or service users is regarded as gross misconduct in our code of conduct.

9.2 Those working for or representing the organisation must not respond to or engage with abusive comments made via anonymous platforms, and must report them to a member of the Senior Management Team. A record will be made and the organisation may seek to further investigate reports of anonymous abuse, as well as share information with the police where necessary.

10. Political Neutrality

10.1 Lancaster University Students' Union is an independent charity and we must ensure that we are not seen to support any political parties, candidates or politicians. Our work, including our social media activity, must therefore never be used as a vehicle for the expression of the political views of any individual employees, volunteers or trustees.

10.2 We expect that all colleagues remain mindful of our responsibilities, and ensure they do not allow their own personal or political opinions to interfere with their work, under any circumstances.

11. Compliance

11.1 Social media must never be used in a way that violates any other organisational policies, by-laws or obligations relating to employees, volunteers or trustees.

12. Monitoring

12.1 The organisation will monitor official social media accounts and we will request the removal of any content deemed to be in breach of this policy.

12.2 We will also monitor references to the organisation online and will act where necessary to protect our reputation.

12.3 Social media sites may be referred to when investigating breaches or complaints under this policy.

13. Breach of this policy

- 13.1 Any breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action.
- 13.2 Any disciplinary action will be taken in accordance with the procedures outlined in the disciplinary procedure for employees and in our Student Members Code of Conduct.
- 13.3 You may be asked to remove content from either an official account and/or from a personal account if we find that it breaches this or any other internal policies. Failure to comply with a request to remove content may also result in disciplinary action.
- 13.4 Disciplinary action may be taken regardless of when a breach is committed and regardless of whether Students' Union equipment or facilities were used in posting the content.
- 13.5 Any content on social media that breaches this policy should be reported to your line manager or the relevant area manager for your activity.

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Appendix 1: Social Media Regulations for Student Groups

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. Lancaster University Students' Union is committed to ensuring all affiliated Student Groups utilise social media sites in a responsible manner, taking advantage of the opportunities for discussion, information-sharing and enhanced learning without risking personal security, and protecting current or future career prospects as well as the reputation of the Students' Union and the University of Lancaster.
- 1.2. The purpose of these regulations is to promote an awareness of how Student Groups should utilise social media responsibly and safely.
- 1.3. If a Student Group breaches the Social Media Policy and/or acts outside these guidelines, an investigation will be carried out in line with the Student Members Code of Conduct.

2. Scope

- 2.1. These regulations apply to all affiliated Student Groups that fall under the jurisdiction of Lancaster University Students' Union.
- 2.2. These guidelines do not form any part of the Students' Union Articles of Association and may be amended at any time by the Board of Trustees. Prior notice will be given where possible but is not necessary.
- 2.3. These guidelines are to be used in conjunction with the Social Media Policy, the Rules and Regulations for Student Groups and any provisions relating to social media as stipulated in formally approved Student Group Constitutions (for the avoidance of doubt this includes all Junior Common Rooms, Student Societies and Sports Clubs).

3. Personal political affiliation and campaigning.

- 3.1. It is essential that student officers, who wish to voice their political opinion or discuss issues that go beyond our remit as a charity draw a distinction between their personal and professional social media presences. Although officers are free to get involved in politics in a private capacity, they must ensure that this is done in a way that is not associated with their work. Adding a disclaimer such as 'views my own' to a social media profile, although encouraged, is not a valid defence.
- 3.2. Therefore, social media accounts that have been created for the purposes of including clubs, societies, college executives and sub-committees must not contain content of a party-political nature. Political campaigning is not limited to discussion of specific parties- endorsing policies that are identified with a specific political party is also prohibited.
- 3.3. Personal social media accounts which are used to publish party-political content (including discussion of policies that are associated with specific candidates or parties) must make no reference to the owner's involvement with the Students' Union.
- 3.4. Distributing political content from personal to professional accounts (via shares etc...) is also prohibited.

- 3.5. Content published from professional/official accounts must avoid hashtags, tags, images or any other content associated with specific political parties.
- 3.6. In common with the rest of the Students' Union, our student media teams are required to avoid specifically endorsing political parties or candidates. The Students' Union's educational remit means that student media teams can discuss any issue as long as all sides of a debate are represented. If student media volunteers hold their own social media accounts relating to specific political causes, no association may be made between those accounts and their published student media content.

4. General Guidance

- 4.1 Committee members are personally responsible for the content they post or share via social media, in group chats or that is shared via the group's social media platforms. It is essential that Student Groups respect the privacy and the feelings of others at all times, and understand that the content posted via social media is a permanent record which is shared instantaneously with a potential global audience.
- 4.2 Students must also be aware that many prospective students are minors (younger than 18 years of age) and that interactions with these persons should always be approached with caution, ensuring that the content of conversations/responses is suitable for under 18s.
- 4.3 Students Groups must not use the Lancaster University or the Lancaster University Students' Union logo on social media sites, other websites or any other materials, unless permission has been sought and approved.
- 4.4 Student Groups online pages, profiles, or groups or any online presence profile may reference their affiliation to the Students' Union, but it must be made clear that comments /posts/shares (subject to the rules in section 3) are the views of the committee/group/individual only.
- 4.5 Any communication by or on behalf of an affiliated Student Group must not:
 - 4.5.1 Do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassing of, any individual e.g. making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age.
 - 4.5.2 Contain images or other content that is sexually explicit or illegal.
 - 4.5.3 Bring discredit to the Students' Union in any way e.g. by insulting fellow students or other individuals; making/sharing defamatory or offensive comments about individuals or groups; liking/posting/sharing/linking to images or other content that is inappropriate, sexually explicit or illegal.
 - 4.5.4 Breach copyright: e.g. by using someone else's images or content without permission, or by failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce.
 - 4.5.5 Breach confidentiality: for example, by revealing confidential information owned by the SU; posting confidential information about an individual, business or other organisation; posting contact details, pictures or personal details of other students or members of staff or members of the public without their prior permission.

4.5.6 Be used to promote or endorse a product or commercial entity unless otherwise agreed by the Chief Executive and/or another appropriate member of the Senior Leadership Team of the Students' Union, to ensure the organisation remains compliant with our legal obligations and/or any commercial contractual obligations the organisation might have.

4.6 General guidance to be applied to each social media interaction includes:

- 4.6.1 Think twice before posting: The internet is permanent and word spreads fast. If you wouldn't publish it on the website or say it to the media then don't post it
- 4.6.2 Make it accurate: Get the facts straight and review content before posting – check for grammatical and spelling errors
- 4.6.3 Be transparent: State that you are a committee member if posting in an official capacity or in relation to your work for the student group.
- 4.6.4 Protect the Student Union's voice: Posts on social media sites should be considerate and respectful in tone. If you are posting on behalf of the Students' Union, or a Students' Union affiliated group, what you say will reflect on the organisation's reputation
- 4.6.5 If posting on an official Students' Union affiliated group's social media presence you are representing the Students' Union and as a representative have a responsibility that your communications are appropriate, accurate, respectful of others and the work that the Students' Union does.
- 4.6.6 Made a mistake? If so admit it, correct it, modify it, and be honest about it and your correction

5. Breaches

- 5.1 Lancaster University Students' Union has the right to request the removal of content from an official social media account and/or any online platform of an affiliated group if it is deemed that the account or its content breaches or Social Media Policy or these regulations.
- 5.2 Student Leaders are held to a higher standard of behaviour the University rules and regulations, and therefore depending on the content posted/shared/liked or favoured, student leaders may also be subject to the Lancaster University Student Discipline Regulations, in addition to proceedings in line with the Students' Unions Student Members Code of Conduct.
- 5.3 Where a student is alleged to have breached this policy and the student disciplinary/conduct procedure has been engaged, the Students' Union may offer support and representation to any student facing disciplinary action.