

GUIDANCE ON INDIVIDUAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

1. Introduction and principles

Social media provide an important tool for BBC output and are used widely by people who work for the BBC in their personal lives. This document provides guidance for those who use social media for professional purposes and for some aspects of personal use.

This Guidance is not intended to prevent the use of social media but to ensure that anyone working for the BBC uses it with appropriate regard for the BBC's values.

The Guidance will help to ensure that the BBC meets its commitment to impartiality. The reputation for impartiality is a huge benefit to the BBC, as well as an obligation, and should never be seen as a restriction, or as an inconvenience or anachronism. In a world of polarised debate and argument the value of impartiality as a core value is more pronounced than it has ever been. Impartiality, not taking sides and reflecting all viewpoints, properly applied can support those confronted with difficult editorial judgements in a world of disputation.

The over-riding principle of this Guidance is that anyone working for the BBC is a representative of the organisation, both offline and also when online, including on social media; the same standards apply to the behaviour and conduct of staff in both circumstances.

Those working for the BBC have an obligation to ensure that the BBC's editorial decisions are not perceived to be influenced by any personal interest or bias. We must retain the trust of the audiences we serve and maintain the BBC's reputation and impartiality.

Everything published by the BBC on social media is governed by the BBC's Editorial Guidelines and now also by this more detailed Guidance. The Guidance also applies, in certain respects, to the personal use of social media by anyone working for the BBC.

Application to everyone working for the BBC (see also section 6)¹.

Individuals working in news and current affairs (across all Divisions) and factual journalism production, along with all senior leaders have a particular responsibility to uphold the BBC's impartiality through their actions on social media and so must abide by specific rules set out in this Guidance.

¹ BBC staff should also refer to the BBC HR Policy on Personal Use of Social Media

Factual journalism includes returning strands which cover topical issues (such as *Countryfile*, *The One Show* and *Woman's Hour*). It does not include, for example, specialist, authored or limited documentary series.

There are also others who are not journalists or involved in factual programming who nevertheless have an additional responsibility to the BBC because of their profile on the BBC. We expect these individuals to avoid taking sides on party political issues or political controversies and to take care when addressing public policy matters.

Individuals working in other areas or who have specific contractual arrangements with the BBC may also be required to adhere to this guidance.

Individuals who don't explicitly identify themselves on social media as working for the BBC but who would otherwise be covered by this Guidance, are required to adhere to these rules as identities can be easily traced.

2. Rules and expectations of social media use for all colleagues (employees, contractors and freelancers)

The following rules and expectations apply to **all** those working for the BBC, for professional (@BBC) and personal social media accounts.

- 1. Always behave professionally, treating others with respect and courtesy at all times: follow the BBC's Values.**
- 2. Don't bring the BBC into disrepute.**
- 3. If your work requires you to maintain your impartiality, don't express a personal opinion on matters of public policy, politics, or 'controversial subjects'.²**
- 4. Don't criticise your colleagues in public. Respect the privacy of the workplace and the confidentiality of internal announcements.**

3. Use of social media: how the rules will be interpreted

The following list of dos and don'ts provide guidance on how the rules will be interpreted: they are not definitive.

² [Ofcom's Broadcasting Code](#) defines political or industrial controversy as political or industrial issues on which politicians, industry and/or the media are in debate.

Things to do

For all colleagues:

- a) Do always treat others with respect, even in the face of abuse. People who work for the BBC should set an example for civilised public debate.
- b) Do assume anything you say or post will be viewed critically.
- c) Even if you are posting in what appears to be a 'private' group, or you have locked down your privacy settings on your accounts, do apply the same standards as if you were posting publicly.
- d) Do be aware that there is no difference between how a personal and an 'official' account is perceived on social media: disclaimers do not offer protection.
- e) If you know you've got something wrong, do correct it quickly and openly.
- f) Do remember that your personal brand on social media is always secondary to your responsibility to the BBC.
- g) Do respect the confidentiality of internal meetings and discussion.

For all colleagues working in news and current affairs (across all Divisions) and factual journalism production and all senior leaders.

- h) Do think about what your likes, shares, retweets, use of hashtags and who you follow say about you, your personal prejudices and opinions.
- i) Do be open to, seek, and respect the widest range of opinion and reflect it.
- j) If you are "live tweeting" a story, do clearly indicate it is developing and your posts are not a final or settled view.
- k) Do think how to signal that a post is a professional judgement, not a personal opinion, with caveats or links to context.
- l) Do use separate posts on public issues rather than join threads started by others.
- m) Do be careful with rebuttals – they can feed conflict.

Things not to do

For all colleagues:

- a) Do not be drawn into ill-tempered exchanges, or exchanges that will reflect badly on you, or the BBC.
- b) Do not post when your judgement may be impaired.
- c) Never use your BBC status to seek personal gain or pursue personal campaigns.

For all colleagues working in news and current affairs (across all Divisions) and factual journalism production and all senior leaders:

- d) Do not reveal how you vote or express support for any political party.
- e) Do not express a view on any policy which is a matter of current political debate or on a matter of public policy, political or industrial controversy, or any other 'controversial subject'.³
- f) Do not offer judgements beyond your specialism.
- g) Do not support campaigns, (eg. by using hashtags) no matter how apparently worthy the cause or how much their message appears to be accepted or uncontroversial.
- h) Do not post anything that couldn't be said on-air or on BBC platforms.
- i) Do not sacrifice accuracy for speed. Second and right is always better than first and wrong – an inaccurate post is a problem for you, your colleagues and the BBC.
- j) Do not break news on a personal account; if you have a story to break, the BBC platforms are your priority, even if it takes slightly longer.
- k) Do not link to anything you haven't read fully.
- l) Do not be seduced by the informality of tone and language on social media. Your posts about news events and issues require careful thought and editorial discipline.
- m) Do not mistake social media networks as accurate reflections of public opinion; your audience is overwhelmingly elsewhere.

Expressions of Opinion on Social Media⁴

Section 2 Rule 3 above requires that you do not express a personal opinion on matters of public policy, politics, or 'controversial subjects' if your work requires you to maintain your impartiality, ie. if you are working in news and current affairs (across all Divisions) and factual journalism production or senior management. Nothing should appear on your personal social media accounts that undermine the perception of the BBC's integrity or impartiality.

Expressions of opinion on social media can take many forms – from straightforward tweets, posts or updates, sharing or liking content, following particular accounts or

³ Rare exceptions, for example, when an individual is affected by a specific local matter such as a planning issue, must be declared as a conflict so that mitigating action can be taken.

⁴ This section applies to those working in news and current affairs (across all Divisions) and factual journalism production or senior management

using campaigning or political hashtags. You should consider carefully every comment before posting.

Avoid the temptation to post quickly and without thinking about the language you are using or how it could be perceived.

Be wary of ‘revealed bias’, whether through likes or re-posting other posts, so that a bias becomes evident, and ‘inferred bias’ where a post is impartial but loose wording allows readers to infer a bias where there is none. Following social media accounts which reflect only one point of view on matters of public policy, politics or ‘controversial subjects’ may create a similar impression.

Use of emojis can – accidentally, or deliberately – undercut an otherwise impartial post.

Avoid ‘virtue signalling’ – retweets, likes or joining online campaigns to indicate a personal view, no matter how apparently worthy the cause.

The impartiality requirements begin when you start working for the BBC: they are not retrospective.

4. Disclaimers

Disclaimers written in biographies or personal profiles such as “my views, not the BBC’s” provide no defence against personal expressions of opinion that conflict with this Guidance and should not be used.

5. Enforcement

Breach of this Guidance may lead to disciplinary action for employees in line with standard disciplinary procedures; this could include possible termination of employment in serious circumstances. For contractors who are found to have breached the Guidance there may be consequences including non-renewal or termination of contract.

6. Who is covered by this Guidance

Everyone who works for the BBC should ensure their activity on social media platforms does not compromise the perception of or undermine the impartiality and reputation of the BBC, nor their own professional impartiality or reputation and/or otherwise undermine trust in the BBC.

The rules set out above (section 2) apply to all colleagues using social media for both work and personal purposes.

Additionally for some roles at the BBC, personal social media activity must also comply with the BBC Editorial Guidelines as though it were BBC output including:

- Individuals who work in news and current affairs (across all Divisions) or factual journalism production.
- All senior leaders in any area of the BBC Group.

Anyone who is using social media for official BBC purposes must follow this guidance as well as the Editorial Guidelines. The Editorial Guidelines apply to all BBC content, regardless of platform.

The extent to which a non-staff member, contributor or presenter is required to comply with the Editorial Guidelines will be set out in the BBC's contractual relationship with them.

It is generally expected that irregular or occasional contributors would not be required to apply the full requirements of the Editorial Guidelines to their social media use.

Actors, dramatists, comedians, musicians and pundits who work for the BBC are not subject to the requirements of impartiality on social media.

Independent production companies that produce social media content which is directly or indirectly associated with the BBC should ensure that this Guidance is followed. Companies should refer to their usual commissioning contact to discuss the application if required.

Guidance on use of social media for BBC programme, brand or genre accounts is available [here](#).

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