



SASC Guidance July 2022

Staying professional on social media

Before posting online **STOP** and ask yourself:

- Might your post reflect poorly on you or your profession?
- Is your intention to post driven by personal or professional reasons?
- Are you confident that your comments or other media posted, if accessed by others, would be considered reasonable and appropriate?

In the field of assessment, teaching and tuition, social media forums can provide a useful place to pick up tips, stay abreast of current developments and research, and exchange ideas and information. Contributing to discussions by offering helpful advice or insights from practice is a great way to connect with others.

Social media can also be a powerful tool in your professional life. If you are self-employed, you can use it to develop a network and establish yourself as a trusted service supplier in your local area and specialist field.

When looking for employment, your social media profiles can give prospective employers a glimpse into your achievements, ideas and interests.

Social media can also be full of pitfalls. Some employers and recruiters now regularly check candidates' social media profiles before employing them, and screenshots of status updates, tweets, 'likes' and information posted, mean your electronic words can live forever, even if you delete them later. Legally, anything posted on any social media forum is deemed to be in the public domain, despite privacy settings and rules in some forums about not sharing posts outside the group. It is therefore important to be cautious in what you react to, even if you belong to a social media group or forum with such rules.

The following tips can be helpful:

1. Be Respectful

In our everyday lives, we now use social media for a variety of purposes, including chatting with friends and family, exchanging political views and opinions and, sometimes, sharing personal information and content.

Professionally, however, it is important to think carefully about the tone, the language and the content of what you post. For example, using capital letters for text can appear 'shouty'

and aggressive. Professionals subscribe to codes of ethics, sometimes written, sometimes implicit in practice. Qualified teachers, for example, are bound by a code of conduct for registered teachers¹ that requires appropriate standards of professional conduct and competence. These codes cover respect and care for others, supporting professional boundaries, maintaining standards of honesty and integrity and avoidance of conduct that could bring the reputation and standing of the profession into serious disrepute.

On professional social media forums, therefore, it is prudent to avoid attacking others. Use your best judgment about your own posts. Could they be viewed in a negative manner? Think before you post, and of course, steer clear of profanity. To impugn other professionals, including current or former employers and professional bodies, is undermining, not only to the confidence of your colleagues, but could reflect negatively on the way you conduct your own work and professional relationships. Are there more appropriate, effective and direct channels to express, for example, personal or professional difficulties you could be experiencing, or issues you feel strongly about?

2. Controversies

Take care before you contribute a view on issues and controversies discussed online. Have in mind the codes of ethics and conduct you, as a professional, have subscribed to. As a professional working in this field you are sensitive to the experiences of others and aware of the need to protect data and client information. Above all, you are someone others need to trust for advice. *How* you express a view, and what *evidence, information* or *research* you use to support that view, is therefore very important as to how credible and useful others will find and trust what you say.

The use of social media can be effective in political campaigns but promoting political or personal views insensitively through professional interest forums can alienate other forum users. It can be easy to react to posts or stories without taking a moment to evaluate whether your view adds any actual value, or what evidence might support that view. If you choose your words carefully, putting thought, attention and relevant detail into your posts, your audience may pay more attention.

3. Personal and sensitive information

Oversharing personal or sensitive information on professional forums is unhelpful and can make others feel very uncomfortable about how to react. Before you post, think about the impact on the people reading your post. What is it that you want to achieve?

Sharing certain personal information on social media, such as a summary of an assessment profile, is completely inappropriate.

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https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKewj2vNPOnPb4AhWxoFwKHTaPAIwQFnoECAMQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fdera.ioe.ac.uk%2F8257%2F3%2Fconduct_code_practice_for_teachers.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0R5CVr3xdxJWKOVOOhfOcP

4. Choose forums carefully

Take care to find out who has set up, owns and controls the forum. Are there moderators and/or administrators on the forums that you sign up to? Are there clearly and well-expressed rules and guidelines for who can join the group and what types of posts are restricted? How do the moderators and forum-users reach agreement around these rules and guidelines? Is there a complaints procedure? Be aware that forums hosted by international companies such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, may have varying policies regarding complaints and abuses and that it may take some persistence to elicit a more formal response.

What groups of people can join the forum? For example, is it open to parents/carers or other individuals as well as professionals? Typical issues faced by any social media forum administrators are whether or not to allow posts that contain offensive or upsetting language, anonymous posts, posts advertising or criticising commercial services, other organisations etc. There are many grey legal and ethical areas around these issues and it is important that all forum users are quite clear about the limits, dangers and possibilities of their posts.

Some professionals in this field prefer to set up or join smaller groups of people they know well, especially for discussing professional practice issues; others find it useful to join larger groups, especially if they are promoting their services or wish to disseminate information to a larger audience. It is useful to think about why you are joining a group and what you hope to achieve from it. Could you achieve those aims more effectively in another context?

5. Privacy

Ensure you have activated your privacy settings, especially if you are self-employed. See: <https://www.copypress.com/blog/privacy-in-social-media/>

Take care before you click on a link in a social media post.