

London School of Theology

Social Media and Digital Communication Policy

For Employees, Visiting Lecturers (VLs), and Visiting Supervisors (VSs)

Process of ratification:	Executive Team
Executive Team Member Responsible:	Director of Finance and Operations
Individual Responsible:	Jonathan Mead
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Review consultation:	Marketing & Communication Manager & Team
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Introduction

London School of Theology (hereafter LST/the School) recognizes the importance and significance of social media and other online communication in this digital age. Social media are forms of electronic communication that allow users to create online communities and share various types of content, for example: Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and WhatsApp. In addition, many other websites allow digital communication between individuals and groups—for example, Reddit, Mumsnet, 4Chan, and many others.¹ Individuals may also have personal websites, blogging platforms, and/or podcasts.

Social media is a key element of the School’s formal communications and marketing activity as led by the Marketing and Communication Manager and Team, who are in turn accountable to the Director of Finance and Administration. In addition to this, we also encourage employees, Visiting Lecturers and Visiting Supervisors to engage with social media platforms as a key means of: (i) promoting the School’s vision, mission, ethos and strategic goals; (ii) commending its programmes of study; (iii) foregrounding its educational philosophy and practice; (iv) showcasing its personnel and community life, and (v) highlighting its wider ministry and outreach.

Although VLs and VSs are technically contracted workers rather than salaried employees of the School, for conciseness references to ‘employees’ should be taken in what follows to apply also to VLs and VSs.

Trustees of the School are not formally included in this policy, but as those with a statutory and fiduciary responsibility to uphold the reputation of the School, it is expected that they will also accord with the principles and protocols defined here.

¹ These others include, but are not limited to: LinkedIn, YouTube, Likee, iMessage, Flickr, Yammer, Yahoo/MSN Messenger, Facebook Messenger, Pinterest, Snapchat, Skype, Truth Social, Weibo, WeChat, VK, QQ/QZone.

We expect that employees will use social media and other online communication responsibly and respectfully, especially when referencing the School and their involvement in the School. This policy sets out guidelines for the appropriate use of social media, and other types of digital communication, in order to maintain a positive and professional online presence, while upholding academic freedom and the values and principles that define us as an evangelical theological college. This policy should also be read with regard to our position as a validated Higher Education Institution (HEI) within the UK, whose programmes are also made available to students overseas.²

A distinct Social Media Policy is in place for LST students, although many elements of that policy overlap with this one.

1. Engagement with the School's own social media platforms

- 1.1. Employees may engage with LST's own social media accounts on Facebook or X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, etc., and with the School's websites, in various ways:
 - 1.1.1. By generating content for publication by the Marketing and Communication Team on these social media platforms and/or websites;
 - 1.1.2. By posting content on these social media platforms and/or websites directly themselves on behalf of the School, as authorised by the Marketing and Communication Team;
 - 1.1.3. By directly commenting on, or sharing, content from these social media platforms and/or websites.
- 1.2. For the avoidance of doubt: in cases 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 above, Employees should liaise on their contribution with the Marketing and Communication Manager or a duly delegated member of the Marketing and Communication Team—except where simply liking, endorsing or sharing material generated by the School.
- 1.3. All content provided by employees for publication on the School's own social media platforms and websites should be in keeping with the vision, mission and ethos of the School, including with its Doctrinal Basis, Community Code and strategic goals.
- 1.4. All employees should be mindful that online behaviour reflects on the School's reputation, recognising that good judgement and professionalism are expected when representing or commenting on the School's activities and profile online.

2. Engagement with social media and online communication as individuals

- 2.1. In addition to authorised contributions to the School's own social media platforms and/or websites, employees should ensure that when referencing the School in

² For background, see the employee Social Media Policy of our validating University, Middlesex: https://api.mdx.ac.ae/uploads/Social_Media_Policy_MDX_DBI_2020_e2e74584ae.pdf?updated_at=2023-07-26T09:51:54.340Z

their personal social media and digital communication, it is clear that that they are speaking on their own behalf rather than formally representing the School.

- 2.2. It is not necessary for employees in all cases to use an explicit disclaimer for online posting (e.g. 'all views my own') but this should be clear from the context, for example: writing in the first person and using a personal e-mail address or username.
- 2.3. Where employees are involved in regularly publishing material on social media or websites other than the School's own—e.g., on blogs, in videos, through podcasts or their own or others' websites, and where this directly intersects with the activities/interests of their contracted work for LST, it is recommended that the person's line manager is made aware of these activities.

3. Free Speech, Respect and Tolerance

- 3.1. Employees have rights of academic freedom and free speech in accordance with the School's Academic Freedom and Free Speech Policy—but as stated in that Policy, they should exercise those rights responsibly, in such a way as to refrain from bringing the School into disrepute. More specifically in line with that same Policy, employees' use of social media and digital communication should demonstrate due tolerance and/or respect for diversity of opinion and belief within and beyond the School community. Constructive engagement should characterise the content and tenor of employees' social media and online discourse, particularly, though not exclusively, when they identify in that discourse as members of the LST community.
- 3.2. In all social media interactions, employees should treat others with politeness and respect, even when discussions or debates involving significant disagreement are in process. Personal attacks, offensive language, discriminatory remarks and verbal abuse are not acceptable.
 - 3.2.1. In some circumstances comments made by employees might be construed by others as falling into the above categories, but might not do so according to the School's own vision, mission, ethos, Doctrinal Basis or Community Code. Where there is any doubt as to the propriety of comments made, advice should be sought from the Marketing and Communication Manager, who will assess them and advise accordingly, informing that person's line manager where appropriate.
 - 3.2.2. In more serious cases, where disciplinary action is deemed to be warranted, the line manager should apply the Staff Disciplinary Procedure, which specifies various levels of escalation up to and including the Executive Team and Principal.
- 3.3. While it is recognised that the Christian vision, mission and ethos of the School might have political implications in a more general sense, and while members of the School community may affiliate with particular political parties or campaigns in a personal or private capacity, they should not use social media to imply that the School itself supports or promotes a specific political party or parties – or any other campaigning or activist group with which the School has not formally affiliated.

- 3.4. The business reputation of the School must be protected, such that employees should avoid posting comments which are disparaging or defamatory about the School, fellow employees, students, suppliers, vendors and other affiliates/stakeholders.

4. Confidentiality and Privacy

- 4.1. Confidential or sensitive information about the School, its employees, students, trustees or any other individuals associated with the institution, should not be shared on social media.
- 4.2. Appropriate permissions should be sought and secured before sharing photos, videos or the personal information of other employees, students, trustees or other individuals associated with the institution. Respect should be shown at all times for others' image rights and rights to privacy.

5. Intellectual Property and Copyright

- 5.1. Copyright laws and intellectual property rights should also be complied with in employees' social media and online interactions. No posting or sharing of copyrighted material should occur without proper authorisation or attribution.
- 5.2. When publishing content on social media and in online interactions that contains material from other sources, due credit should be given, with a link or links back to the original source whenever possible.
- 5.3. The School has a distinct Intellectual Property Policy, to which reference should be made if there is any doubt about the application of the above.

6. Professionalism and Integrity

- 6.1. Honesty, transparency and integrity are essential in social media and online interactions. Employees should not misrepresent themselves or the School in such interactions.
- 6.2. The School's social media and other online platforms should not be used for personal gain, promotion or advertising of employees' personal work beyond their work for the School, or of their personal products or goods, without prior approval from the Marketing and Communication Manager.
 - 6.2.1. Where doubt arises in such contexts, the Marketing and Communication Manager may refer the matter to the relevant employee's line manager, who may in turn seek a determination from the Director of Finance and Administration, and/or the Executive Team.

- 6.3. Employees should avoid developing and/or maintaining private, non-work-related contact with current students via social media, particularly through private one-to-one messaging. Employees should normally contact students through their LST email, Microsoft Teams or the VLE.
- 6.4. Where employee-student messaging via social media platforms or messaging apps such as WhatsApp is deemed necessary, this should normally be to designated School student *groups* rather than to individual students (e.g., to an employee's Tutor Group).

Where one-to-one social media/messaging communication is believed to be helpful— e.g., for educational or pastoral support, for School-related social, community, sporting or musical events, or for other events and conferences—this should be limited, professionally appropriate, and relevant to those purposes.

- 6.5. Where other online communication is deemed necessary, it should be for educational or pastoral reasons related to a students' programme, formation and formal membership of the School, and should be explained to and approved by the employee's line manager.
- 6.6. Where a student has a close family relationship with an employee (e.g., as a son, daughter, sibling etc.), or where a long-standing friendship has existed between a student and an employee prior to the student's enrolment, special exemptions to the above social media/messaging protocols will be agreed with the Academic Dean, HR Manager and, if necessary, the Executive Team.

7. Cyberbullying and Harassment

- 7.1. Cyberbullying, harassment, or any form of online intimidation is unacceptable, and will be addressed through the Employee Disciplinary Procedure.
- 7.2. Employees are expected to report any instances of cyberbullying, harassment or online intimidation perpetrated by a fellow employee to that person's line manager, who will take such disciplinary action as may be deemed necessary, in accordance with the School's Employee Disciplinary Procedure.
- 7.3. Employees are also expected to act on any instances of cyberbullying, harassment or online intimidation they witness being perpetrated by students in accordance with the appropriate Informal and/or Formal procedures set out in Student Disciplinary Procedure.

8. Compliance with Laws and Policies

- 8.1. Employees are required to adhere to all applicable laws, regulations and policies when using social media platforms and other online communication—including other associated policies of the School itself. Pursuant to this, they should familiarise themselves with the terms of service and privacy settings of the social

media and other online platforms they use, ensuring that they understand how their information is being shared and protected.

9. Consequences of Policy Breaches and Violations

- 9.1. Breaches and violations of this Policy may result in disciplinary action, in accordance with the Employee Disciplinary Procedure.
- 9.2. It is the duty of each employee to familiarise themselves with this Policy, and of line managers to ensure that those they manage are familiar with it. In keeping with this, new employees should be introduced to this policy as part of their induction.