

RCP social media policy – staff and volunteers

November 2025

Contents

1. Purpose of this policy	2
2. Scope of this policy	2
3. Guiding principles	3
4. Raising concerns	4
5. Standards of behaviour when using social media	4
6. Official RCP social media channels	4
7. Using personal social media to promote or discuss the RCP	5
8. Confidentiality and privacy	7
9. Misuse of social media	8
10. Relevant RCP policies and guidance	9
11. Key contacts	9
12. Commitment to review	9

1. Purpose of this policy

This social media policy sets out the principles governing social media use by individuals engaged with the Royal College of Physicians (RCP), including employees, volunteers, elected or appointed position holders, fellows and members running for election, and any other person acting in a contracted or representative capacity for the college.

The policy covers activity that is related to the RCP, its work, its reputation, as well as personal social media activity that may have an impact on the college.

The principles of this policy complement and are underpinned by the RCP [Code of Conduct](#) for all fellows and members and professional standards and expectations, such as the GMC's [Good medical practice](#), its social media guidance for doctors, and doctors' own employer's social media guidance. For employed staff, it is underpinned by a range of people policies available on Spark, the RCP's intranet.

The purpose of the policy is to:

- **Support respectful online engagement:** ensuring that the online conduct of individuals working at or associated with the RCP upholds standards of professionalism and a respect for others that is consistent with the RCP values, Code of Conduct and the expectations of the physician profession.
- **Safeguard confidentiality:** to protect confidential, propriety or other sensitive organisational information and act in compliance with legal and ethical obligations (including GDPR).
- **Safeguard the reputation and integrity of the RCP:** ensuring that online and social media activity by those engaged with the RCP does not undermine public trust, professional credibility or the college's standing.
- **Prevent conflicts of interest:** helping individuals recognise and avoid situations where online activity could be perceived as a breach of the RCP's non-partisan position.

For more information on the topics covered in the policy, please contact the relevant RCP teams listed below under key contacts. Relevant guidance and policy documents are also detailed below.

2. Scope of this policy

This policy applies to anyone working for or representing the RCP, including:

- **All staff** regardless of contract type, working hours or seniority
- **Elected and appointed roles** including, but not limited to, senior officers, committee chairs, special advisers and elected councillors (including for the period when standing for election or applying for appointed roles)
- **Volunteers** including those volunteering in an advisory, administrative or support capacity, examiners and individuals serving on RCP committees, boards or working groups
- **Contractors, consultants and agency workers** when representing or acting on behalf of the RCP
- **Any individual acting in an official RCP capacity** even on a temporary or ad hoc basis.

This policy applies to all forms of social media and digital/online communication, including, but not limited to:

- microblogging platforms (such as X and Bluesky)
- professional social networking sites (such as LinkedIn)
- social networking platforms (such as Facebook)
- image and video sharing platforms (such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok)
- online forums or message board platforms (such as Reddit)
- any other online channel enabling online, public communication.

The policy covers:

- **Professional use** – activity conducted in an official capacity on behalf of the RCP
- **Personal use** – activity conducted in a personal capacity where there is, or could reasonably be perceived to be, an affiliation with the RCP.

The policy applies to public-facing social media activity, such as posts, as well as private messaging functions, such as direct messages and communications in semi-private social media groups.

3. Guiding principles

Social media use should reflect the same standards of professionalism, accuracy and respect expected in all other professional and public-facing activities for the RCP.

The following principles apply to activity on all the social media platforms identified in the purpose and scope section:

- **Personal responsibility:** Individuals are personally accountable for all content they publish. This includes, but is not limited to, posts, comments, shares, images and other digital media. Responsibility extends to ensuring accuracy and appropriateness, and compliance with professional standards.
- **The permanence of content:** Social media can remain publicly accessible indefinitely, even after deletion. Individuals should consider the potential long-term visibility and impact of their posts before publishing.
- **Accurate representation of the RCP:** When referencing the RCP, its work, or professional roles associated with it, individuals must ensure that content reflects the college accurately. Misrepresentation, exaggeration or dissemination of misleading information is **unacceptable**. On personal accounts, users should be mindful that affiliation with the RCP may be inferred, and posts should **avoid** compromising the RCP's reputation, relationships or professional standing.
- **Respectful and professional engagement:** all interactions on social media should be conducted with courtesy and respect. Individuals must not engage in bullying, harassment or abusive behaviour. Content must not discriminate or target individuals or groups.
- **Alignment with RCP codes and values:** the principles of this policy complement and are underpinned by the RCP [Code of Conduct](#), expectations of safeguarding confidential information, and professional standards expectations, such as the GMC's [Good medical practice](#). Social media use should always reflect the RCP's [values](#) and uphold the highest standards of professional integrity.

4. Raising concerns

It is important everyone covered by this policy feels able to raise issues and share any thoughts or concerns about RCP business and ways of working.

We encourage this through our established internal channels, which are designed to ensure that issues are addressed fairly and promptly. Escalating matters publicly or via social media before using these routes can hinder resolution and compromise confidentiality.

Feedback is welcomed through committees, networks, managers and senior officers in day-to-day interactions. To raise more formal concerns, RCP staff should follow the Raising concerns policy available on Spark, the RCP's intranet. Fellows, members and anyone working for the RCP in a voluntary capacity should contact concerns@rcp.ac.uk.

By speaking up internally, you help us to maintain a respectful and accountable college.

5. Standards of behaviour when using social media

Staff and volunteers at the RCP are expected to uphold the highest standards of professionalism when using social media. Individuals are reminded that they remain representatives of the RCP by virtue of their association with it, even when acting in a personal capacity on social media.

As such, individuals should conduct themselves in a manner that reflects the values of the RCP.

In particular:

- Social media should not be used to post, share or endorse content that could reasonably be interpreted as bullying, harassment, defamatory or abusive.
- All interactions should reflect a commitment to constructive and respectful dialogue, even when discussing contentious issues
- Members and fellows must adhere to the principles set out in the RCP [Code of Conduct](#), ensuring that online behaviour aligns with the college's commitment to respect, professionalism and public trust.

6. Official RCP social media channels

The RCP maintains a range of official social media accounts to promote its mission, engage with its membership and stakeholders, and share information on its activities on professional, educational and policy matters.

These channels are managed centrally by the Communications team in the RCP Communications, Policy and Research directorate to ensure accuracy, consistency, and alignment with RCP strategy.

6.1 Access and permissions

- Administrative access to the RCP's social media accounts is managed centrally by the Communications team and access is granted only to authorised staff or volunteers with the formal agreement of the team.
- Temporary access to the RCP's social media channels for specific campaigns or events may be granted to other associates of the RCP but only with prior approval of the Communications team and under direct supervision.

- All logins and passwords are held securely by the Communications team and must not be shared without explicit authorisation from the Communications team. The Communications team can provide more information on account security and user authorisation.

6.2 Oversight and content management

- The Communications team is responsible for scheduling, publishing and moderating all content on the RCP's core social media channels.
- The Communications team can grant scheduling, publishing and content moderation privileges for wider RCP team staff members or volunteers operating the specialist RCP social media channels, such as those set up specifically to promote museum or journal activity.

6.3 Collaboration with other teams

- Staff members and volunteers who wish to promote specific events, campaigns or activity via official RCP channels should contact the Communications team with supporting material in advance.
- The Communications team will advise on the most effective use of official channels, taking into account audience, timing and format.
- Where appropriate, the Communications team may cross-promote content on multiple platforms to maximise reach.
- During election periods, everyone covered by this policy should adhere to specific elections guidance materials. These will include specific information for candidates and marketing and communications guidance for employed staff members.

7. Using personal social media to promote or discuss the RCP

The college welcomes individuals supporting its communications or activity through social media. This can include sharing news, highlighting events or engaging publicly on topics relevant to the RCP's mission and remit. Individuals are encouraged to act as ambassadors for the RCP while maintaining standards of professionalism and integrity.

Examples of supportive activity include:

- sharing or reposting content from official RCP accounts
- creating posts that highlight RCP work or events positively
- engaging respectfully with the wider public on topics relevant to the RCP or the medical profession.

7.1 Best practice and coordination

To ensure RCP messaging is consistent, accurate and aligned with RCP priorities, individuals are encouraged to engage with the Communications team in the RCP Communications, Policy and Research directorate before creating or publishing posts that promote college work.

The Communications team can provide guidance on:

- key messaging and the appropriate tone
- recommended hashtags, handles or tags to maximise reach and impact
- advice on timing, frequency, and content format for optimal engagement.

7.2 using personal accounts

When posting on a personal account and where an individual's association with the RCP is visible or widely known, care must be taken to make clear they are posting in a personal capacity. This is particularly important if views are contrary to the RCP's official position on key matters of public health and policy.

Where an individual's association with the RCP is visible or widely known, they must ensure that their posts align with the principles of this policy, RCP values and relevant professional standards, guidance and codes.

Except when sharing posts from RCP social media channels, use of the RCP's branding (logo, visual identity or other branded assets) on personal accounts requires written authorisation from the RCP.

7.3 Bios and disclaimers

When using social media accounts that reference role, position or affiliation with the RCP, it is important to provide accurate and up-to-date information in profiles or biographies. This ensures transparency and helps audiences understand the nature of the relationship with the RCP.

If an individual's RCP role is included in their social media profile, this information should:

- clearly state role or title, if it relates to work or responsibilities with the RCP
- be kept current and reflect the official position
- include disclaimers, such as 'views are my own', which are recommended for personal commentary on accounts that may reasonably be linked to the RCP. Even with disclaimers, individuals remain accountable for their content. Disclaimers do not exempt users from adhering to the RCP values, Code of Conduct, or legal or professional obligations.

If in doubt about how to present a bio or disclaimer, consult the RCP Communications team for guidance (media@rcp.ac.uk).

7.4 Reacting to comments about the RCP or its work

Caution should be exercised when engaging with comments or criticism related to the RCP, its work, or its other individuals associated with it on social media. Responding directly can unintentionally escalate situations or spread misinformation.

Guidance for handling negative comments:

- It is encouraged **not** to respond publicly from personal accounts where there is a clear affiliation with the RCP or official accounts unless authorised. Maintain professionalism in any correspondence, ensuring actions do not compromise the RCP's reputation or relationships, nor contravene the RCP Code of Conduct or other policies.
- If you see something of concern, document interactions and share this information with the Communications team (media@rcp.ac.uk) or via the concerns email (concerns@rcp.ac.uk)

7.5 Political views and personal commentary

The RCP operates on a non-partisan basis and only engages in political matters to the extent that they are directly relevant to its policy and advocacy objectives. RCP activity should adhere to Charity Commission guidance on [elections](#) and [campaigning and political activity](#).

- Individuals should not create the impression on social media that their personal political views are endorsed by, or represent, the RCP. Authorisation from the RCP's policy team is required for any political advocacy or campaigning posts from official RCP social media accounts.
- During general and local elections, and referenda, the Policy team will circulate specific guidance via email to staff, the senior executive team and senior officers on the use of social media during the [pre-election period](#). The Policy team will be involved in approving posts from official social media accounts relating to political announcements, for example commenting on manifestos.

For more information on this and the RCP's policy and advocacy work, please contact policy@rcp.ac.uk.

7.5.1 Personal political views

The RCP recognises the right of individuals to express political opinions on their personal social media accounts. This policy does not seek to regulate personal political expression where there is no link to the RCP.

However, where an account associates the individual with the RCP – for example, through a role title, profile description, or frequent discussion of RCP-related work – individuals must take care that such commentary does not:

- create the impression that they are speaking on behalf of the RCP
- damage the RCP's relationships with stakeholders or its public reputation
- conflict with the RCP's impartiality on matters of policy and advocacy.

Wherever possible, political or policy commentary on personal accounts should be clearly separated from RCP-related content.

8. Confidentiality and privacy

The RCP holds information that is confidential, sensitive or legally protected and the unauthorised disclosure of such information can have consequences. All individuals associated with the RCP have a responsibility to protect the RCP's confidential information.

8.1 Protecting confidential information on social media

- Be careful of sharing internal RCP discussions, unpublished research or reports, meeting minutes or any other information intended for restricted audiences.
- Avoid posting, images, screenshots, or documents that could reveal confidential material.
- Content posted in private or restricted-access online groups should also be treated with caution as such content may be shared beyond its intended audience.
- RCP representatives involved in RCP Board of Trustees and Council proceedings should refer to the rules of engagement for this committee. Information is available from council@rcp.ac.uk.

8.2 GDPR and safeguarding individuals

- Be vigilant to avoid indirect identification of individuals in posts or comments including patients, members, or staff without their formal consent.

- Do not reference cases, incidents or events in way that could compromise someone's privacy or safety.
- All personal data must be handled in compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the RCP's [data protection policy](#).

9. Misuse of social media

The RCP is committed to fostering a culture of respect in all forums including online spaces. It takes a zero-tolerance approach to bullying, harassment or abuse online.

9.1 Reporting misuse of social media

- Individuals who experience bullying, harassment or threatening behaviour on social media related to their RCP role should not engage directly with it.
- If people believe they are experiencing or witnessing bullying, harassment or abuse online in a context connected with the RCP, or involving those associated with the RCP, they are encouraged to report it promptly. Staff should raise concerns with the People and Culture team via HRMatters@rcp.ac.uk, while fellows, members and other volunteers should use concerns@rcp.ac.uk.
- The RCP takes all reports seriously and will act in line with its established procedures to address issues.

9.2 Breaches of policy

The emphasis of this policy is on supporting responsible and professional use of social media. However, misuse that compromises professionalism, confidentiality, or the reputation of the RCP will be taken seriously.

The RCP expects all staff, volunteers and representatives to uphold this policy. Where concerns are raised about potential breaches, these may be reviewed under the RCP's established conduct and disciplinary procedures. Individuals may be asked to cooperate with any investigation to ensure a fair and thorough assessment of the matter.

Breaches of this policy will be taken seriously and addressed under the RCP's existing disciplinary and conduct procedures. The response will be proportionate to the nature and seriousness of the breach and may range from informal advice and training to formal disciplinary action. Serious or repeated breaches, such as harassment, unauthorised disclosure of confidential information, or conduct that risks damaging the RCP's reputation, may result in sanctions up to and including dismissal (for staff), termination of voluntary or membership roles and fellowship removal. Where appropriate, the RCP may also refer matters to external regulators or authorities.

Individuals will always have the opportunity to respond to concerns before any action is taken.

9.2.1 Support and advice

The RCP recognises that issues arising from social media use can sometimes be complex or distressing. Anyone who is uncertain about how this policy applies to them, or who experiences online abuse or negative interactions in connection with their RCP role, is encouraged in the first instance to seek guidance and support from the People and Culture team via HRMatters@rcp.ac.uk. This team can also provide details of confidential advice and wellbeing support.

10. Relevant RCP policies and guidance

This policy should be read in conjunction with an individual's substantive employer's guidance, professional guidance, such as the GMC's [Good medical practice](#), and other RCP policies and guidance documents, including:

- the RCP [Code of Conduct](#)
- the RCP [values](#)
- elections guidance (published during each election period).

Additional policies, including the RCP's People and Culture policies and social media platform, content creation and crisis management guides are available on Spark, the RCP's intranet, and via the Communications team respectively.

11. Key contacts

- Communications team – media@rcp.ac.uk
- Policy team – policy@rcp.ac.uk.
- RCP concerns – concerns@rcp.ac.uk
- People and Culture team – HRMatters@rcp.ac.uk
- RCP registrar – registrar@rcp.ac.uk
- Membership – membershipqueries@rcp.ac.uk
- GDPR enquiries – dataprotection@rcp.ac.uk
- Committees team – council@rcp.ac.uk

12. Commitment to review

This policy will be reviewed 2 years from the date of issue.

Last review: November 2025

Next review: November 2027