

AA Media and Social Media Guidelines
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AA Media and Social Media Guidelines

- 1 Scope
- 2 Engagement with Media Outlets or Institutions
- 3 Use of Social Media for AA Promotion
- 4 Political Statements
- 5 Personal Social Media
- 6 Use of Group Chats
- 7 Responsibilities Under the AA Code of Behavioural Expectations
- 8 Legal Considerations
- 9 Related Policies and Procedures

Introduction

The Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture (the School) was founded as student-focused collective in 1847 as a unique institution dedicated to the independent promotion of ideas. Since its founding, the AA has provided a dynamic platform for new voices in the field of architecture and an open environment for discussion. The AA recognises that social media plays a vital role in furthering the mission of the School and that its use can provide a platform for new voices and discussion.

For an international community such as that of the AA, social media enables a range of perspectives and experiences to be shared and debated. Social media also enables the public to benefit from the work of the school and contribute to the development of ideas.

The AA is committed to being a place for discussion, where ideas can be tested and disseminated without fear of control or limitation. With this commitment comes a need to recognise the risks that social media can present, such as the potential loss of privacy, the sharing of sensitive data, incurring reputational damage and becoming the catalyst for disputes. Use of social media comes with the need to be aware of the impact a post or comment may have on others, and how this activity could be perceived, misinterpreted or cause harm, even if unintentional. These Guidelines offer parameters around social media posts for AA School purposes and its promotion, and matters that need to be considered when using social media for professional and personal reasons. The Guidelines also provide parameters for staff authoring or contributing to other media outlets or institutions, such as written articles or podcasts.

The Guidelines should be read alongside the [Freedom of Speech Code of Practice](#) and the [Code of Behavioural Expectations](#). Nothing in this guidance is intended to restrict or limit the right to freedom of speech by AA students and staff.

1 Scope

These Guidelines apply to all students and staff when utilising social media in respect of their work or study at the AA.

The Guidelines apply to the use of all forms of 'social media' including (but not limited to) Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok and other social media sites, messaging forums and blogs. 'Social media posts' include both those written by the account holder, posted by the account holder and posts by others that are reshared by the account holder.

The AA cannot take responsibility for the actions or omissions of its staff or students when making posts or comments on personal social media, nor can or should the AA regulate the content of personal social media. The AA will in exceptional circumstances be entitled to consider complaints relating to the impact of personal social media posts, as explained in Section 6.

The Guidelines do not form part of the Academic Regulations or Employee Handbook, although a breach of the Guidelines can still have consequences as set out below.

2 Engagement with Media Outlets or Institutions

Staff at the AA will often be asked to contribute to or author articles, take part in interviews, lectures or podcasts, or show work in exhibitions for various media outlets or institutions. The AA encourages external engagement and recognises it is often beneficial for the promotion of the School and its students. Where staff are asked to comment or contribute in their capacity as an employee of the AA to an article about the School, its work, students or staff, a discussion should be held with the Head of Communications should be in advance of posting for review of the quote/article content. It is also important that AA staff make clear to journalists the basis upon which they are being quoted, eg as an architect with their own practice, as the Head of an AA Unit or Programme, or as an individual in a personal capacity without mentioning their role at the AA.

A written agreement with journalists should be obtained when there are plans to collaborate with the School on a project. Any agreement must be clear on the permissions and use of student and staff work, including research and intellectual property rights in such works owned by the AA and relevant students. Students should also be consulted, and their agreement to participate in the collaboration should be obtained.

3 Use of Social Media for AA Promotion

The AA recognises that the School, and its staff, use social media to promote their work and achievements at the School, and those of their students. The AA encourages such use in line with the [Microsites Guidelines](#) and the AA Style Guide.

No personal information of others should be disclosed within a post unless explicit and written permission has been obtained in advance of posting from the individual by the author of the post, including their name or image.

The AA and its staff are entitled under the Student Intellectual Property Rights Policy (see the [Academic Regulations](#)) to use a student's work on social media in promotion of the AA and its programmes, but the author of the post must always ensure the student is appropriately referenced.

4 Political Statements

It is important that all students and staff are able to exercise their freedom of speech as protected by the law and all are encouraged to engage with debates, discussions and initiatives in a respectful way.

Just as importantly is the need for the AA to remain independent, not allying itself, and not to be seen to be allying itself, with any specific cause, opinion or group. This is in part to ensure the AA remains a safe space for all and because as a registered charity, the AA is not permitted to express any political affiliation or take sides on any political issue (unless it relates directly and specifically to the AA's charitable objects, that is, the study of architecture). The AA cannot permit any individual or group to promote any cause or take a political position by using the AA's name, explicitly or implicitly.

For further detail on the legal position see Section 8, and Section 5 on the use of personal social media.

5 Personal Social Media

The AA does not seek to regulate or limit the social media posts of staff and students' personal social media accounts. However, where you choose to identify yourself as being a student or staff of the AA, no one reading your post should reasonably assume that your own personal views (whatever they may be) are necessarily those of the

AA. If you think there may be some doubt or confusion about that, please think about including a sentence such as: 'The views and opinions expressed here are solely my own, and so do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the AA.' The AA logo should not be used on personal social media accounts unless authorised in advance by the Communications Studio or an AA social media post is being shared.

All social media posts should be respectful, and their author should consider how a post, including those being reshared or reposted, could be open to misinterpretation, or potentially cause distress or harm to others.

Staff of the AA, particularly those who have significant responsibilities for overseeing students or managing a team or department, need to consider the position of authority and trust that they hold. With the benefits of such responsibilities comes the need to appreciate that social media posts are likely to be read by other staff and students and that their position of authority means a post could be more likely to cause distress or concern, due to the perceived additional influence that person has at the AA. Consideration of the impact of social media activity should be in line with the AA's Code of Behavioural Expectations, which is explicit regarding the consequences of intimidating behaviour, harassment and bullying.

6 Use of Group Chats

The AA recognises that messaging apps such as WhatsApp are often used by staff and their students to communicate with each other during their time at the AA. The AA encourages all staff and students to use their AA email addresses and the Student Information System as the means by which to communicate.

If a social media group is established, staff and students must appreciate that the AA cannot be responsible for the content or messages shared within the internal group chat, nor if a breach of privacy occurs, eg contact details, images or messages being shared outside of the group.

Where a group is established, the administrator of the group should ensure the following terms are made clear to all users:

- Contact details are shared only for the purposes of this group, and should not be shared outside of the group chat without the permission of the individual
- Messages should relate to the purposes of the group only
- Group members must be respectful of each other and comply with the AA Code of Behavioural Expectations
- Be respectful of confidentiality and do not share content outside of the group
- Discourage messaging at unsociable times
- Do not spam the group
- Do not hold one-to-one conversations on the group

7 Responsibilities Under the AA Code of Behavioural Expectations

The Code sets out the expectations of students and staff in terms of their behaviour towards each other, both inside the AA premises and outside the premises, where the behaviour has a direct impact on another student or member of staff.

Students and staff should consider the Code of Behavioural Expectations in respect of all their social media posts. A social media post should:

- Be respectful
- Be appropriate in tone
- Make clear that views, opinions or political statements are personal
- Not breach someone's privacy or confidentiality
- Have the appropriate permissions
- Not defame or discriminate
- Not incite violence or hatred

Staff and students should not use social media to bring the AA into disrepute or cause reputational damage to the AA, its students or staff. Such behaviour can result in disciplinary action.

The threshold for considering complaints or grievances relating to personal social media will be high. It is important to highlight that being offended, even if deeply offended by a viewpoint of opinion, is not harassment.

Any complaint about an alleged breach of the Code of Behavioural Expectations should be brought under the AA Complaint Procedure or the AA Grievance Procedure (if the complaint is against a member of staff).

8 Legal Considerations

Freedom of Speech

Freedom of speech and academic freedom protect the right for all to express lawful opinions and viewpoints. The starting point will always be that an opinion or viewpoint, even where it may offend or be controversial, is lawful and permitted. The AA has a Freedom of Speech Code of Practice which provides more detail.

The AA will not seek to interfere with staff or students' personal use of social media where the opinion or viewpoint expressed is lawful. However, the AA will consider a complaint and disciplinary action should staff or students post material that is defamatory, discriminatory, a breach of confidentiality or data privacy, or potentially criminal in nature, such as those that:

- Incite hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation, religion or race
- Encourage someone to commit a terrorist act or other criminal offence
- Encourage support for a terrorist organisation
- Threaten violence or to kill
- Intentionally harass or intimidate

Anyone who is the victim of a criminal act will be encouraged to report the matter to the police, and the AA will do all it can to support any criminal investigation. The AA's Complaint Procedure cannot replace a criminal investigation, and any criminal investigation would result in the AA's procedures needing to be paused.

Outside of criminal matters, the AA will seek to address complaints directly and informally where appropriate, or through their internal AA Complaints Procedure or staff Grievance Procedure if formal action is required.

Charity Law and Political Statements

The AA's charitable purpose is 'to promote and afford facilities for the study of architecture for the public benefit.' The AA has a legal duty to ensure its activities and the use of its resources further its charitable purposes for the public benefit.

Charity law prohibits the AA and those speaking for it to undertake political campaigning or political activities such as making political statements other than those that support the delivery of the AA's charitable purposes (the study of architecture). The AA, or those speaking on its behalf, are not therefore able to make political statements or be utilised as vehicles to support a political campaign or political party. Such action can put at risk the charitable status of the AA and its individuals could find themselves subject to disciplinary action.

Equality Act 2010

Social media posts can, on occasion, leave students or staff feeling distressed or offended when they are made by a fellow student or staff member. However, being upset or even deeply offended by a social media post is not the basis upon which a complaint or grievance can be raised under the AA Complaints Procedure or Staff Grievance Procedure, nor is it harassment under the Equality Act, or a criminal matter.

Harassment under the Equality Act is unwanted behaviour that is defined as:

'A person (A) harasses another (B) if:

- (a) A engages in unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, and
- (b) the conduct has the purpose or effect of:
 - (i) violating B's dignity, or
 - (ii) creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for B.'

Whether a social media post constitutes harassment, and therefore a complaint can be considered, will be based on an objective person's view rather than that of the individual effected. The objective view will consider whether it is reasonable for the social media post to have caused the alleged impact in all the known circumstances.

9 Related Policies and Procedures

- Code of Behavioural Expectations
- Freedom of Speech Code of Practice
- Academic Regulations for the Student IPR Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- AA Complaints Procedure
- Staff Grievance and Disciplinary Procedure
- Dignity at Work and Study Policy
- Prevent Policy
- IT Acceptable Use Policy