# Social Media Policy

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| **Approved on** | **20th July 2026** |
| **Approved by** | **Board of Trustees** |
| **Next Review Date** | **16th July 2029** |

## Change Record

| Date of Change: | Changed By: | Comments: |
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| 15.11.23 | JPT | New additions for The Charity Commission (in yellow) |
| 10.7.25 | JPT | No changes |
| 23.4.26 | SR | Addition of section - Use of social media for work purposes |
| 16/07/26 | JPT | Terminology changes |

### Purpose of the Guidelines

The difference between a personal and professional opinion can be blurred on social media, particularly if you're discussing issues relating to Essex and Thames' work. While we encourage the use of social media, we have certain standards, outlined in this policy, which we require everyone to observe. Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary in the public domain.

This policy is intended for staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners, and applies to content posted on both an Essex and Thames device and a personal device. Before engaging in work-related social media activity, staff must read this policy.

This policy sets out guidelines on how social media should be used to support the delivery and promotion of Essex and Thames, and the use of social media by staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners in both a professional and personal capacity. It sets out what you need to be aware of when interacting in these spaces and is designed to help support and expand our official social media channels, while protecting the charity and its reputation and preventing any legal issues.

The aim of these guidelines is to help:

- Protect and support trainees, apprentices and staff contributing to, and engaging with, social media
- Encourage good practice
- Protect the reputation of Essex and Thames Education, its staff, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners, partner organisations and clients.

### Scope of the Guidelines

These social media guidelines are aimed at staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners who use, or intend to use, social media as part of their studies or work at Essex and Thames Education. These guidelines also apply to staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners' personal use of social media where their comments could be taken to reflect on Essex and Thames Education.

## Contacts

Any questions or concerns about the interpretation or operation of this policy should be taken up with Essex and Thames Education's CEO (jo@ete.org.uk) or COO (eleanor@ete.org.uk).

**What is social media?**

Social media is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interactions, content-sharing and collaboration. Websites and applications dedicated to forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation and wikis are among the different types of social media. Prominent examples include: Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin, Reddit, Pinterest, TikTok and Instagram.

**Staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners' responsibilities**

It is the responsibility of all staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners to read and act in accordance with the principles of these guidelines, and regularly check the website for any minor updates to documents. It is also their responsibility to read and act in accordance with the rules and guidelines set out by individual social media, social networking and website hosting companies and providers.

Staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners must:

- Act lawfully in the use of social media and to be aware that criminal and civil proceedings can be taken in the event of unlawful activity.
- Remain mindful of, and respect, Essex and Thames Education's values and the Code of Conduct when using social media, in line with the terms and conditions of registration.
- Note that social media may not be used to inform or promote inappropriate behaviour or actions which damage the reputation of individuals or Essex and Thames Education.
- Remember to follow the anonymity and confidentiality rules set out by the course and/or the professional standards set out by the Professional and Statutory Regulatory Bodies for professional studies. If Trainees, apprentices and practitioners breach the code of conduct of a professional body (e.g. DfE), it may directly affect their future learning and career aspirations.
- Don't use social media to attack others and remember to respect other people's privacy and feelings. If Trainees, apprentices and practitioners break the law on social media sites (for example by posting something defamatory) they will be personally responsible.
- Always ask permission before sharing private details about your fellow Trainees, apprentices and practitioners, staff, Essex and Thames Education, its partner organisations and clients. Such details could include private contact details, pictures or details of private discussions.
- Remember to be appropriate when engaging with staff, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners or clients of Essex and Thames Education through social media. Inappropriate information, promotion of events/activities or contact may breach the Trainee, apprentice and practitioner Code of Conduct.
- Make sure they adhere to all ethical requirements of Essex and Thames Education if you're using social media as part of a research study or project. Trainees, apprentices and practitioners also need to consider intellectual property rights, copyright and ownership of data.
- Not state or imply that their views are those of Essex and Thames Education when using social media; nor use Essex and Thames Education logo at any time.

**Using Essex and Thames Education's social media channels - appropriate conduct**

1. The CEO is responsible for setting up and managing Essex and Thames' social media channels. Only those authorised to do so by the CEO will have access to these accounts.

2. As an SLT we respond to comments Monday-Friday, 9am-4pm.

3. Be an ambassador for our brand. Staff should ensure they reflect Essex and Thames Education's values in what they post and use our tone of voice.

4. Make sure that all social media content has a purpose and a benefit for Essex and Thames Education, and accurately reflects Essex and Thames Education's agreed position.

5. Bring value to our audience(s). Answer their questions, help and engage with them

6. Take care with the presentation of content. Make sure that there are no typos, misspellings or grammatical errors. Also check the quality of images.

7. Always pause and think before posting. That said, reply to comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate.

8. If staff outside of Essex and Thames Education wish to contribute content for social media, whether non-paid for or paid for advertising, they should speak to the CEO about this.

9. Staff shouldn't post content about partnership schools or Trainees, apprentices and practitioners without their express permission. If staff are sharing information about partnership schools or Trainees, apprentices and practitioners, this content should be clearly labelled so our audiences know it has not come directly from Essex and Thames Education. If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify a child or young person, everyone must ensure they have the consent of a parent or guardian before using them on social media.

10. Always check facts. Staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners should not automatically assume that material is accurate and should take reasonable steps where necessary to seek verification, for example, by checking data/statistics and being wary of photo manipulation.

11. Be honest. Say what you know to be true or have a good source for. If you've made a mistake, don't be afraid to admit it.

12. Staff should refrain from offering personal opinions via Essex and Thames Education's social media accounts, either directly by commenting or indirectly by 'liking', 'sharing' or 'retweeting'. If you are in doubt about Essex and Thames Education's position on a particular issue, please speak to the CEO.

13. It is vital that Essex and Thames Education does not encourage others to risk their personal safety or that of others, to gather materials. For example, a video of a stunt.

14. Staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners should not encourage people to break the law to supply material for social media, such as using unauthorised video footage. All relevant rights for usage must be obtained before publishing material.

15. Staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners should not set up other Facebook groups or pages, Twitter accounts or any other social media channels on behalf of Essex and Thames Education. This could confuse messaging and brand awareness. By having official social media accounts in place, the charity can ensure consistency of the brand and focus on building a strong following.

16. Essex and Thames Education is not a political charity and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. We have every right to express views on policy, including the policies of parties, but we can't tell people how to vote.

17. If a complaint is made on Essex and Thames Education's social media channels, staff should seek advice from the CEO (jo@ete.org.uk) before responding. If they are not available, then staff should speak to the Eleanor French (eleanor@ete.org.uk)

18. Sometimes issues can arise on social media which can escalate into a crisis situation because they are sensitive or risk serious damage to the charity's reputation. The nature of social media means that complaints are visible and can escalate quickly. Not acting can be detrimental to the charity.

The SCITT SLT regularly monitors our social media spaces for mentions of Essex and Thames Education so we can catch any issues or problems early. If there is an issue that could develop or has already developed into a crisis situation, the CEO will do the following as necessary:

1. Seek expert advice;
2. Respond on social media;
3. Close down the channel;
4. Launch an investigation.

If any staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners become aware of any comments online that they think have the potential to escalate into a crisis, whether on Essex and Thames Education's social media channels or elsewhere, they should speak to the CEO immediately.

**Use of personal social media accounts - appropriate conduct**

This policy does not intend to inhibit personal use of social media but instead flags up those areas in which conflicts might arise. Essex and Thames Education staff are expected to behave appropriately, and in ways that are consistent with Essex and Thames Education's values and policies, both online and in real life.

1. Be aware that any information you make public could affect how people perceive Essex and Thames Education. You must make it clear when you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of Essex and Thames Education. If you are using your personal social media accounts to promote and talk about Essex and Thames Education's work, you must use a disclaimer such as: "The views expressed on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent Essex and Thames Education's positions, policies or opinions."

2. Staff who have a personal blog or website which indicates in any way that they work at Essex and Thames Education should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with a member of SLT.

3. Those in senior management, and specialist roles where they are well known in their field of expertise, must take particular care as personal views published may be misunderstood as expressing Essex and Thames Education's view.

4. Use common sense and good judgement. Be aware of your association with Essex and Thames Education and ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself.

5. Essex and Thames Education works with several high profile organisations and people.  Please don't approach high profile organisations or people from your personal social media accounts to ask them to support the charity, as this could hinder any potential relationships that are being managed by the organisation. This includes asking for retweets about the charity.  If you have any information about high profile people that have a connection to our cause, or if there is someone who you would like to support the charity, please speak to the CEO to share the details.

7. If Staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners are contacted by the press about their social media posts that relate to Essex and Thames Education, they should talk to the CEO immediately and under no circumstances respond directly.

8. Essex and Thames Education is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. When representing Essex and Thames Education, staff are expected to hold Essex and Thames Education's position of neutrality. Staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners who are politically active in their spare time need to be clear in separating their personal political identity from Essex and Thames Education, and understand and avoid potential conflicts of interest.

9. Never use Essex and Thames Education's logos or trademarks unless approved to do so. Permission to use logos should be requested from the CEO.

10. Always protect yourself and the charity. Be careful with your privacy online and be cautious when sharing personal information. What you publish is widely accessible and will be around for a long time, so do consider the content carefully. When you are using social media sites at work, it is important that you do so safely.

11. Think about your reputation as well as the charity's. Express your opinions and deal with differences of opinion respectfully. Don't insult people or treat them badly. Passionate discussions and debates are fine, but you should always be respectful of others and their opinions. Be polite and the first to correct your own mistakes.

12. We encourage staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners to share tweets and posts that we have issued. When online in a personal capacity, you might also see opportunities to comment on or support Essex and Thames Education and the work we do. Where appropriate and using the guidelines within this policy, we encourage staff to do this as it provides a human voice and raises our profile. However, if the content is controversial or misrepresented, please highlight this to the CEO who will respond as appropriate.

**Use of social media for work purposes**
Social media, whether the Essex & Thames account or personal account must never be used to share or transmit personal information.  Information must only be shared using secure encrypted methods at all times.

**Libel**
Libel is when a false written statement that is damaging to a person's reputation is published online or in print. Whether staff are posting content on social media as part of their job or in a personal capacity, they should not bring Essex and Thames Education into disrepute by making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups.

**Copyright law**
It is critical that all  staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners abide by the laws governing copyright, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. Never use or adapt someone else's images or written content without permission. Failing to acknowledge the source/author/resource citation, where permission has been given to reproduce content, is also considered a breach of copyright.

**Confidentiality**
Any communications that  staff, trustees, Trainees, apprentices and practitioners make in a personal capacity must not breach confidentiality. For example, information meant for internal use only or information that Essex and Thames Education is not ready to disclose yet. For example, a news story that is embargoed for a particular date.

**Discrimination and harassment**
Staff should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, on either an official Essex and Thames Education social media channel or a personal account. For example:

- making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief
- using social media to bully another individual
- posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content

**Lobbying Act**
Charities are legally allowed to campaign to bring about a change in policy or law to further their organisational purpose. In most cases, spending on charity campaigns that are in accordance with charity law will not be regulated under electoral law. However, the Lobbying Act, which was passed in January 2014, states that during national elections (known as regulated periods) spending on campaigning activities may be regulated.

**Use of social media in the recruitment process**
Recruitment should be carried out in accordance with the Recruitment Policy, and associated procedures and guidelines. Any advertising of vacancies should be done through SLT.

There should be no systematic or routine checking of a candidate's online social media activities **during** the recruitment process, as conducting these searches might lead to a presumption that an applicant's protected characteristics, such as religious beliefs or sexual orientation, played a part in a recruitment decision. However following recruitment a basic internet check will be carried out in line with the DfE compliance criteria.

**Protection and intervention**
The responsibility for measures of protection and intervention lies first with the social networking site itself. Different social networking sites offer different models of interventions in different areas. For more information, refer to the guidance available on the social networking site itself. For example, Facebook. However, if a staff member considers that a person/people is/are at risk of harm, they should report this to the CEO immediately.

**Under 18s and vulnerable people**
Young and vulnerable people face risks when using social networking sites. They may be at risk of being bullied, publishing sensitive and personal information on their profiles, or from becoming targets for online grooming.

Where known, when communicating with young people under 18-years-old via social media, staff should ensure the online relationship with Essex and Thames Education follows the same rules as the offline 'real-life' relationship. Staff should ensure that young people have been made aware of the risks of communicating and sharing information online, and given guidance on security/privacy settings as necessary. Staff should also ensure that the site itself is suitable for the young person and Essex and Thames Education content and other content is appropriate for them.

**Responsibilities and breach of policy**
Everyone is responsible for their own compliance with this policy. Participation in social media on behalf of Essex and Thames Education is not a right but an opportunity, so it must be treated seriously and with respect. For staff, breaches of policy may incur disciplinary action, depending on the severity of the issue. Please refer to our Disciplinary Policy for further information on disciplinary procedures. Staff who are unsure about whether something they propose to do on social media might breach this policy, should seek advice from the CEO.

**Public Interest Disclosure**
Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, if a staff member releases information through Essex and Thames Education's social media channels that is considered to be in the interest of the public, Essex and Thames Education's Whistleblowing Policy must be initiated before any further action is taken.