Policy and guidance on the use of social media

Introduction

This document sets out the expectations of the PSA regarding its members' usage of social media, particularly in relation to PSA accounts.

The PSA recognises and supports the benefits that the use of social media can bring to our field. For the purposes of this policy, social media is defined as a type of interactive online media or application that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum. This includes online social forums such as LinkedIn, BlueSky, X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok etc., anonymous apps, blogs and longer form writing, such as Substack and Patreon, video-and image-sharing apps and websites and similar facilities. These platforms can be used to share information, to keep users up to date with information, and promote healthy academic debate about controversial subjects and areas of research.

As with all public-facing publishing and posting, there is, however, an inherent risk attached to using social media as it is a powerful and far-reaching form of communication. Inappropriate use therefore has the potential to impact negatively on the Association, our members and stakeholders and the field as a whole, causing reputational damage and harm.

While the PSA encourages its members and stakeholders to engage and collaborate through social media, we encourage all to be aware of the potential impact on others and on the PSA itself.

Who needs to be aware of this policy?

This policy relates to all PSA members and stakeholders in relation to the creation of, or contributions to, any of the social media or online content described above. It should be applied to all use and all forms of social media or online content where there is potential impact on the PSA, whether related to the operational effectiveness of the organisation; the achievement of its strategic objectives; or to the wider reputation of the PSA.

Those in a position of responsibility who might be seen as representing the PSA or its views on certain issues should be particularly mindful of their use of social media in that capacity. This expectation applies to PSA staff and volunteers; trustees; PSA network and committee members, Specialist Group convenors and other stakeholders involved with the PSA. PSA members should be aware that statements made on personal accounts which identify the individual's membership of or affiliation to the PSA, or which make reference to any aspect of PSA business, are also implicated by this policy. When and where appropriate, PSA members might choose to use a general disclaimer in relation to any PSA affiliation such as '*all views expressed are in a personal capacity and do not reflect the views of the PSA.*'

General guidance

- PSA members and stakeholders should never represent the PSA in a false or misleading way. All statements regarding or pertinent to the PSA must not be misleading; all claims must be substantiated.
- PSA members and stakeholders should apply the same standards of conduct and respect online as they would be expected to adhere to in any other setting or context.
- Social media and networking platforms are in the public domain and it is not always possible to be sure what is being viewed, shared or archived, even if material is posted on a closed profile or group. There can be no reasonable expectation that posts will remain private and will not be passed on to other people, intentionally or otherwise. Material published online may have the potential to be available publicly and indefinitely.
- Inappropriate behaviour via social media may constitute harassment and bullying and may therefore fall under the PSA's anti-harassment policy. In such cases members and stakeholders may be subject to the investigatory and disciplinary procedures set out in that policy.

Possible action

- The PSA may occasionally request that members or stakeholders remove social media postings which are deemed to constitute a breach of this policy and failure to comply with such a request may lead to disciplinary action.
- Activities which are in breach of this policy or which, in the opinion of the PSA Executive Committee, may bring the PSA into disrepute may be subject to investigation and disciplinary action. Such action will be proportionate to the nature of the offence and may include a written warning; temporary or permanent loss of position (if the person holds an official PSA post); or temporary or permanent removal from the membership. These possible actions regarding membership are outlined in the PSA's bye-laws.

Statement on political impartiality and standing for elected office

PSA members and stakeholders may also be members of political parties and therefore may take part in campaigning or standing for election to public office. They may also take up positions as elected members in local or national governments. Members and stakeholders should be mindful that the PSA is a politically neutral organisation which will not endorse particular parties or candidates. As such, in the event that members are seeking public office, they should not draw undue attention to their PSA membership or, if applicable, any officer/leadership role e.g. through their personal social media profiles, or use this to support their campaign or suitability for office. Not adhering to the PSA social media policy in relation to political campaigning or in the conduct of public office may also be subject to disciplinary proceedings.