INTERNATIONAL
FOUNDATION GROUP

091. IFG Social Media and Acceptable Use Policy

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Statement and Purpose

Social media platforms enable staff, students, and partners of IFG to express and share ideas, to build networks, and to enhance learning and community engagement. At the same time, inappropriate use of social media carries risks, including harm to individuals, damage to the College's reputation, and exposure to legal or regulatory action.

The purpose of this Policy is to:
- safeguard IFG's students, staff, reputation, and values;
- promote safe, respectful, and responsible use of social media;
- clarify expectations regarding both official and personal social media use; and
- support effective use of social media in teaching, learning, and professional practice.

Scope

This policy applies to all staff, students, hourly paid lecturers, associate lecturers, temporary workers, agency staff and individuals engaged with the institution on a self-employed and/or contract basis.

The Policy covers both official use of IFG-authorised accounts; and personal use of social media by staff and students, where such use has, or could reasonably be perceived to have, an impact on IFG or its community.

Definitions

Social media: refers to online platforms that allow the creation, sharing, or exchange of information and content within a virtual community. This includes, but is not limited to: YouTube, Facebook, Vkontakte, Weibo, WhatsApp, Instagram, Signal, Telegram, Snapchat, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, Pinterest, TikTok, Threads, blogs, discussion forums, and comment sections on websites.

Official IFG Social Media Accounts: IFG has the following social media accounts - Facebook, Instagram, X, Linkedin, Threads, TikTok and Bluesky. In addition the College has a YouTube Channel. IFG social media accounts are managed and maintained by a marketing agency, Accelerant (https://whyaccelerant.com/)who are responsible for content and posting.   However, responsibility for the concept/theme, content, accuracy and message rests with the Director of Marketing & Partnerships who reviews posts before they are posted.

The College has recently set up an Alumni Facebook Group for IFG Alumni and current students to sign -up to and interact and post content. In addition the College employs several former students who act as Student Ambassadors who are encouraged to use their own social media accounts to promote IFG but to follow the principals outlined in this policy.

Personal Social Media Accounts: accounts created by individuals in their own name and used primarily for personal purposes, but which may still have implications for IFG if the user identifies as a member of staff or student.

Users: all staff, students, contractors, and associates within the Scope of this Policy.

Content: any text, image, video, audio, or other material posted on social media platforms.

General Principles
IFG expects all staff, students, and associated individuals to use social media responsibly, lawfully, and in ways that uphold the College's values. The following principles apply to all social media activity within the scope of this Policy:

- Professional boundaries – staff must not use personal social media accounts to communicate directly with students for teaching, assessment, or pastoral purposes. Approved College systems and tools should be used instead.
- Compliance with College policies – social media use must comply with the College's Data Protection Policy and Procedure, Safeguarding Policy, Sexual Misconduct, Harassment and Unacceptable Behaviour Policy and Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.
- Confidentiality – users must not disclose confidential or sensitive information about the College, its staff, students, or partners.
- Respect and dignity – users must not post content that could be considered discriminatory, harassing, defamatory, or otherwise offensive, including derogatory comments relating to sex, race, religion or belief, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, or age. Bullying and harassment via social media are strictly prohibited.
- Intellectual property – users must not infringe copyright or other intellectual property rights, for example by reproducing images or content without permission or attribution.
- Reputation – users must not bring the College into disrepute through inappropriate or misleading online activity. Complaints or grievances must be raised through official College procedures, not via social media.
- Security – users should protect accounts through strong passwords and, where available, multi-factor authentication.
- Responsible engagement – when posting opinions in a personal capacity, staff and students should make clear that their views are their own and do not necessarily represent the College.

Use of Official Social Media Accounts
Official IFG social media accounts are a key channel for promoting the College's reputation, engaging with stakeholders, and supporting recruitment, teaching, and student life. To ensure consistency and accountability:

- Authorisation – new official accounts may only be created with the approval of the Marketing and Partnerships Director, who maintains a register of authorised accounts.

- Content standards – all content must be accurate, respectful, and consistent with the College's values and strategic messaging. Posts must comply with applicable legislation and the General Principles of this Policy.
- Approval and monitoring – the Marketing and Partnerships Director, along with the external marketing agency Accelerant (https://whyaccelerant.com/) are responsible for overseeing official accounts, including content planning, approval processes, and regular monitoring of activity.
- Training – staff managing official accounts must complete training provided or approved by the College before being given publishing rights. Refresher training may be required periodically.
- Branding – use of the College name, logo, and visual identity on official accounts must comply with the College's brand guidelines.
- Responsibility – account holders are responsible for moderating comments and reporting inappropriate or abusive content to the Marketing and Partnerships Director without delay.

Using personal social media accounts
The College recognises that staff and students may use personal social media accounts in their private lives. While such accounts are not formally connected to the College, personal use can still affect the reputation of the institution and the wellbeing of others. The following rules therefore apply:

- Personal capacity – staff and students must make clear that views expressed are their own and not those of the College. This may be done by including a disclaimer such as "views are my own" in profile information.
- Account names and branding – personal accounts must not use the College name, logo, or branding in a way that suggests they are official College accounts.
- Professional boundaries – staff must not use personal accounts to communicate with students for academic or pastoral purposes. All teaching, assessment, and student support must take place via approved College systems.
- Respect and dignity – personal accounts must not be used to harass, bully, or discriminate against members of the College community, or to post content that could reasonably be considered offensive or damaging to the reputation of the College.
- Confidentiality – College information, including student or staff data, internal documents, or commercially sensitive material, must never be shared on personal accounts.
- Reasonable use at work – staff should limit personal use of social media during working hours to breaks and must not allow it to interfere with their duties.

Social media and teaching
- The College supports the use of digital platforms to enhance learning and collaboration. However, to protect students and staff, and to ensure consistency of practice, the following principles apply:
- Approved platforms – all teaching, learning, and assessment activities must take place through College-approved platforms such as the Moodle virtual learning environment (VLE), Office 365 (including Teams), and other systems formally adopted by the College.
- External tools – staff may not require students to use unapproved external social media tools (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook groups, or similar) for formal teaching, assessment, or pastoral purposes.
- Voluntary use – students are free to use external social media platforms informally to support peer learning, but such groups or channels are not monitored or endorsed by the College.
- Privacy and safeguarding – staff and students must avoid exchanging personal contact information or engaging in private messaging with students via personal social media accounts.
- Content sharing – where teaching materials are shared on social media (e.g. promotional blogs, podcasts, or videos), copyright and intellectual property rights must be respected and the College's branding guidelines followed.

Monitoring and acceptable use
The College has a responsibility to ensure that official social media accounts are managed appropriately and that use of social media by staff and students does not compromise safety, wellbeing, or reputation.

- Oversight – The Marketing and Partnerships Director is responsible for establishing and maintaining official College social media accounts, ensuring content standards, and moderating activity.

- Monitoring – activity on official accounts is subject to routine monitoring by the Marketing and Partnerships Director. The College may also investigate reported concerns relating to personal social media use where there is a reasonable connection to the College.
- Data protection – monitoring will be proportionate and compliant with the Data Protection Act 2018, the Human Rights Act 1998, and related legislation. The College will not engage in unjustified intrusion into private communications.
- Unacceptable use – social media use that breaches this Policy, other College regulations, or the law may be investigated under the College's disciplinary procedures. Examples include discriminatory behaviour, disclosure of confidential information, or content that damages the reputation of the College.
- Reporting concerns – staff, students, or other stakeholders who identify inappropriate or unsafe social media content should report it to the Marketing and Communications Team, who will refer matters to the Registrar or other senior officers as appropriate.

Online safety

The College is committed to promoting safe and responsible use of social media. To protect themselves and others, all staff and students should follow these guidelines:

- Limit personal information – avoid posting personal details such as home addresses, phone numbers, or financial information.
- Protect credentials – use strong passwords and, where possible, multi-factor authentication to secure accounts.
- Be alert to scams – do not click on suspicious links, and be cautious of phishing attempts received via social media platforms.
- Read terms and conditions – be aware of the rights you may be granting to social media providers when uploading photographs, videos, or other content.
- Think before posting – remember that content shared on social media may remain accessible for many years, and could be retrieved through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests or Data Protection Subject Access Requests (SARs).
- Respect privacy – do not share images, recordings, or personal information of others without their consent.

Social media and legislation

Any unlawful act committed offline can equally be committed through the use of social media. Staff and students are therefore reminded that their online activity must comply with UK law as well as College policies. Breaches of the following legislation may occur through inappropriate use of social media:

- Communications Act 2003 – regulating offensive, indecent, or threatening communications.
- Contempt of Court Act 1981 – prohibiting publications that may prejudice legal proceedings.
- Data Protection Act 2018 – governing the collection, processing, and disclosure of personal data.
- Defamation Act 2013 – covering publication of false statements that damage reputation.
- Equality Act 2010 – prohibiting discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.
- Malicious Communications Act 1988 – prohibiting the sending of grossly offensive or threatening communications.
- Offences Against the Person Act 1861 – including offences relating to threats or incitement of violence.
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997 – prohibiting harassment and stalking behaviours.
- Sexual Offences Act 2003 – criminalising the sharing of sexual or indecent images without consent.

Other legislation relevant to social media use includes:
- Human Rights Act 1998 (incorporating Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the right to respect for private and family life).
- Digital Economy Act 2017.
- Online Safety Act 2023.
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.
- Telecommunications (Lawful Business Practice) (Interception of Communications) Regulations 2000.

When monitoring social media use, the College will act proportionately and in line with data protection requirements. Staff should avoid any actions that may constitute an invasion of privacy.

Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, incorporated into UK law through Schedule 1 of the Human Rights Act 1998, covers the right to respect for private and family life. The College will therefore ensure that monitoring of social media use is justified, proportionate, and compliant with these protections.

Disciplinary action over social media use
Failure to comply with this Policy may result in disciplinary action under the College's procedures for staff or students. The seriousness of any breach will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account intent, impact, and any mitigating factors.

- For staff – breaches may be investigated under the College's Staff Disciplinary Policy. Outcomes may range from informal warnings and mandatory training through to formal warnings, suspension, or dismissal in cases of gross misconduct.
- For students – breaches may be investigated under the Student Disciplinary regulations. Outcomes may include warnings, withdrawal of access to College IT systems, or suspension or expulsion in the most serious cases.

Examples of misconduct – breaches that may lead to disciplinary action include (but are not limited to):

- posting discriminatory, harassing, defamatory, or offensive content;
- sharing confidential College or personal data without consent;
- misrepresenting the College through unauthorised use of its name, branding, or logo;
- engaging in bullying, harassment, or threats towards staff, students, or third parties;
- using social media to bring the College into disrepute.

Referral to external authorities – in cases involving potentially unlawful behaviour, the College reserves the right to refer matters to the police, regulatory authorities, or professional bodies.

Associated Policies
This policy should be read in conjunction with:
- Data Protection Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech
- Staff disciplinary
- Student Non-Academic Misconduct Policy

Communication
IFG will ensure that this Policy is communicated effectively to all staff, students, and associated individuals through the following mediums:

- Induction – all new staff and students will be briefed on the key principles of this Policy as part of their induction.
- Training – staff with responsibility for managing official College social media accounts will receive mandatory training, with refresher sessions provided periodically.
- Ongoing awareness – guidance and resources will be available through the College intranet and webpages, with regular reminders issued via staff and student communications.
- External partners – where appropriate, agents, contractors, and collaborative partners will be made aware of the standards set out in this Policy.
- Updates – any significant changes to this Policy will be communicated promptly to all relevant parties.

Monitoring and Review

IFG is committed to ensuring that this Policy remains effective, up to date, and aligned with regulatory expectations.

- Policy owner – the Marketing and Partnerships Director is responsible for the ownership and maintenance of this Policy.
- Oversight – the Operations Board and IFG Academic Staff will provide oversight, ensuring the Policy is implemented consistently and effectively across the College.
- Review – the Policy will be reviewed at least every two years, or sooner if required by changes in legislation, sector guidance, or institutional practice.
- Feedback – staff, students, and partners are encouraged to provide feedback on the Policy to the Marketing and Partnerships Director , who will consider suggestions as part of the review process.
- Reporting – updates on the implementation and effectiveness of this Policy may be reported to the Academic Board and the Board of Governors as appropriate.