An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development

Social Media Policy

Social Media Policy

The Department of Rural and Community Development's Twitter account @DeptRCD is managed by the Department's Press and Communications Unit.

Content:
If you follow us on social media, you can expect posts covering some or all of the following:
- Press releases on the Department's activities and Ministerial speeches
- Event information and occasional live coverage of events
- Important updates from the Department
- Alerts about the new content on our website
- Other practical information on services available through the Department

Who we follow:
If you follow us on Twitter, we will not automatically follow you back. This is to help our followers identify other Twitter accounts that we are following such as other DRCD-affiliated Twitter accounts, other Government Departments, Houses of the Oireachtas, relevant European institutions and accounts of particular relevance to Ireland.

Replies and Direct Messages:
In general, the Department's Twitter account will be used to disseminate information and will not be used to respond to queries.

Please do not include private or personal information when contacting us via social media. The best means of communicating a query is by contacting the Department via the details on our website.

Likes or retweets from our accounts do not equal endorsement. Abusive or spam tweets will result in followers being blocked and reported directly to Twitter.

Availability:
Twitter may occasionally be unavailable and we accept no responsibility for lack of service due to Twitter downtime.

Our Social Media Presence:
In addition to our main Twitter account, @DeptRCD, the Department and its agencies also operate the following Twitter feeds:

Tidy Towns: @TidyTownsIre
Libraries and Community Policy: @Community_hubs
LookWest.ie: @LOOKWEST.ie
Pobal: @Pobal
Irish Water Safety: @IWSie
Charities Regulator: @Charities_Reg

While the Department as a whole does not operate a Facebook account, there are accounts run by Tidy Towns, Irish Water Safety and the Charities Regulator:
Tidy Towns: Tidy Towns Ireland, @OfficialSuperValuTidyTowns
Charities Regulator: Charities Regulator, @CharitiesRegulator
Irish Water Safety: Irish Water Safety, @ISEie

1.0 What is Social Media?

The Department accepts the definition by the National Archives and Records Administration USA of social media as referring "to the various activities integrating web technology, social interaction and user generated content; that social media includes blogs, wikis, social networks, photo libraries, virtual worlds, location based services and video sharing sites; noting 'agencies use social media internally and externally to share information, support business processes and connect people to government'.

1.1 Purpose of This Social Media Policy

Corporate and social media play significant roles in worldwide communications. The use of social media, in particular, is increasing constantly. In keeping with the Government's policy of openness and transparency, we want to operate in a manner which facilitates the sharing of information, both internally and externally, using corporate and social media as communication tools. Like most Government Departments, we have a social media presence on Twitter with one account operating in the Department and four accounts operating by bodies under the aegis of the Department. Currently, Twitter is our only social media accounts; we do not have a corporate presence on Linkedin etc.

We use our Twitter to provide the best possible array of information to citizens and stakeholders. Our internal corporate media communications activities, such as the use of email and our intranet, are designed to improve internal communications, cross-divisional engagement and collaboration and information sharing.

This document includes a guideline to our overall internal corporate and social media strategy and rules for operating accounts. It applies to all Departmental staff, whether permanent, temporary or on contract. The policy extends to all social media sites and incorporates any future developments of such media. It also applies to internal communication tools such as the Department's intranet site, and incorporates any future developments of this site.

1.2 Intranet

The Departments intranet site is currently being developed, and will contain news bulletin features for communication with staff. This is designed to promote effective internal communications, cross-divisional engagement and information sharing. It is not for sharing of personal information and as such ongoing developments will be monitored, this policy will be updated in line with the development of the Departmental Intranet.

2.0 Social Media Strategy

The Department's social media goals are to:

- Provide information on the Department's work
- Provide an optional avenue to engage with stakeholders
- Enhance the profile of the Department
- Monitor events and breaking news
- Monitor feedback on proposed and existing policy
- Be a channel for emergency information
- Promote time-bound campaigns

2.1 Internal Corporate Media Strategy

The Department's internal corporate media goals are to:

- Develop a shared understanding of the organisation's objectives
- Facilitate internal communication in a timely manner
- Enhance collaborative working arrangements
- Be a channel for information sharing
- Provide an avenue to engage with internal stakeholders

2.2 Best Practice – Putting the Policy into Effect

The amount of time put into maintaining social media sites is relatively small while the effects can be far-reaching, if correctly used. The following is a guide to best practice for internal corporate and social media accounts/activity:

- **Be responsive and open:** Social media accounts should adopt a less formal and more conversational tone compared to official press releases or other communications. Staff are encouraged to bear in mind that the audience is likely to actively monitor social media from a number of sources on a regular basis and to communicate directly with the account holder.
- **Be discreet and use your judgement:** Remember not to say anything on social or internal corporate media that we would not say in any other public forum.
- **Be considered and consistent:** Do not post or share anything which breaches copyright or that could be construed as advertising or promoting a commercial company. Take into account cultural sensitivities and avoid posting anything that could be considered offensive.
- **Do no harm:** Be respectful and civil in tone, objective and impartial in substance. Personal opinions should not be expressed at any time. Do not respond to abusive replies.
- **Be aware:** It is important to remember that anything put on social media or internal corporate media is in the public domain and can be there indefinitely.
- **Be constructive:** Feedback is good – a protracted online argument is not.

- **Use Irish public sector resources only:** Do not use copyrighted images or resources which are not in the public sphere without authorisation. State Agencies have significant resources in terms of imagery, infographics, etc.
- **Be aware of relevant legislation** when posting any material, including laws governing Data Protection, FOI, AIE, Copyright, Equal Status, etc.

3.0 Management – Oversight of Social Media Practice

It is the responsibility of the Head of a Business Unit to ensure that social media accounts maintained within their Units adhere to this policy. Each social media account should be managed by the Information Officer within the Business Unit. The Information Officer is responsible for regular posting and gaining clearance as required. Every individual member of staff is responsible for their own internal corporate media activity. If you intend to set up an official account, please make a business case to the Head of the relevant unit. The Head of the Corporate Services should also be advised so the Press and Communications Office can be made aware of the account. The following clearance system should be used when posting:

- **Go ahead** if posting information already in the public domain, printed or delivered quotes, or if you are referring to established policy in your area of expertise.
- **Seek guidance** if considering posting (a) a comment on breaking news where there is no agreed press line; (b) interpretations of policy change; (c) ministerial movements and/or (d) rebuttals. Do not break news unless you have been directly approved to do so. Seek guidance first from your Head of Business Unit and then from the Head of Corporate Unit if necessary. You should notify the Press Office.
- **Do not post** personal information, classified data or comments on anything outside of your area of responsibility.
- **Security –** be sure to use an account password that fits with DRCD Password Policy. In the unlikely event that your account is compromised, contact the ICT Helpdesk immediately.

3.1 Remember the 7 C's

1. **Common sense** – Use common sense when posting.
2. **Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour** – Any posts should be in accordance with the relevant legislation, circulars and code.
3. **Confidentiality** – No confidential material should be posted.
4. **Circumspection** – Be circumspect in posting any material related to the work of the Department. Be aware of the potential reputational risk which could arise in the event of inappropriate posts. This risk will be reflected in the Department's Risk Register.
5. **Certainty –** Do not post anything unless you are certain of its validity and veracity.
6. **Capacity –** If you are commenting on work related matters, as an employee of this Department, you should not be commenting in a personal capacity. No comment should be made on issues relating to the policy or functions of the Department. No comments should be posted which risk you breaching civil service regulations including the Official Secrets Act, 1963 and the Personnel Code on Official Secrecy, Circular 15/1979.
7. **Corrections –** If you get it wrong please correct your error **immediately** and let the Press and Communications Office know.

4.0 Personal Accounts

1. We are all free to use personal social media accounts on our own time. However, we need to have a number of safeguards to ensure official information is not disclosed without appropriate authorisation. No political commentary is to be made. In addition, posts should comply with the relevant legislation, circulars and code. Staff must follow these guidelines on personal accounts.

   - Only post work-related information that is already in the public domain if you feel the need to post about such matters, e.g. Department press releases or updates on issues that are already public information. Do not engage in a discussion on the merits of anything that relates to your job or offer opinions on departmental or Government policy. It should be borne in mind that statements on personal accounts may be mistakenly regarded by readers as official views. Stating that your views are personal is no insurance against negative media or other publicity.

   - Be clear about the difference between official accounts and personal ones; if you identify yourself as an employee of the Department, particularly in order to be seen as speaking with authority, then you should not be operating a personal account for that purpose. If you wish to formally post material in an official capacity, then it is more appropriate to do so from an official account. By failing to do so, you risk breaching civil service regulations including the Official Secrets Act, 1963 and the Personnel Code on Official Secrecy and Integrity, Circular 15/1979.

   - On your LinkedIn account, if you have one, you can give your job title, and link to the DRCD website if you wish. Remember, only post work-related information that is already in the public domain.

   - INTRANET is not a personal account and is subject to these guidelines. Failure to abide by these guidelines may result in permission to access and to update the Intranet being withdrawn.

The Department recognises that staff, in their own private capacity, may wish to view or publish comment on the internet, for example in blogs, message boards or on social networking sites, such as Facebook or Twitter. Such activities are however, **prohibited while using any Department IT and Telecommunications systems, unless specifically required and approved for official reasons.**

5.0 Dealing with Mistakes

In making full use of social media, mistakes will occasionally happen. How the Department deals with a particular mistake will depend on the nature of the error. Your online conduct is subject to the same disciplinary rules as your offline conduct. There are a few steps you should take if you make a mistake:

- Delete the post and apologise for the mistake, explaining that the material was posted by mistake and is not an official view.
- Post the correct information if the mistake was factual, making clear what you've corrected.
- Inform your line manager and the Press Office for advice on further handling.

6.0 Review and Update

This policy will be reviewed and updated periodically or when necessary, to ensure that any changes to the Department's business practices are properly reflected in the policy.