



# Policy for Use of Social Media and Engagement with Other Media



2016

# Document Control

Amendment History			
Date	Version*	Author	Details
August 2016	0.1	J. Pitchers	Creation of 1st draft
September 2016	0.2	J. Pitchers	Creation of 2nd draft
August 2017	1.1	J. Pitchers	Acknowledgement added on page 2

\*All documents in development are indicated by minor versions (e.g. 0.1, .02, etc.). The first version of a document to be approved for release is given major version 1.0. The system continues in numerical order each time a document is reviewed and approved.

Approval History		
For Approval by	Version	Date Approved
AAPT Council	1.0	September 2016

Circulation / Publication History	
Circulated via / Published on	Date
AAPT AGM	September 2016

AAPT would like to thank Carla Valentine, Technical Curator/Public Engagement Officer at Barts Pathology Museum for her help in developing this policy.

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# 1. Scope of Policy

This policy applies equally to:

- Members of all grades (Affiliate, Associate, Student, Member, Fellow)
- Company Members
- Council Members
- Honorary Officers

This policy will come into force following the 2016 annual general meeting of AAPT Members.

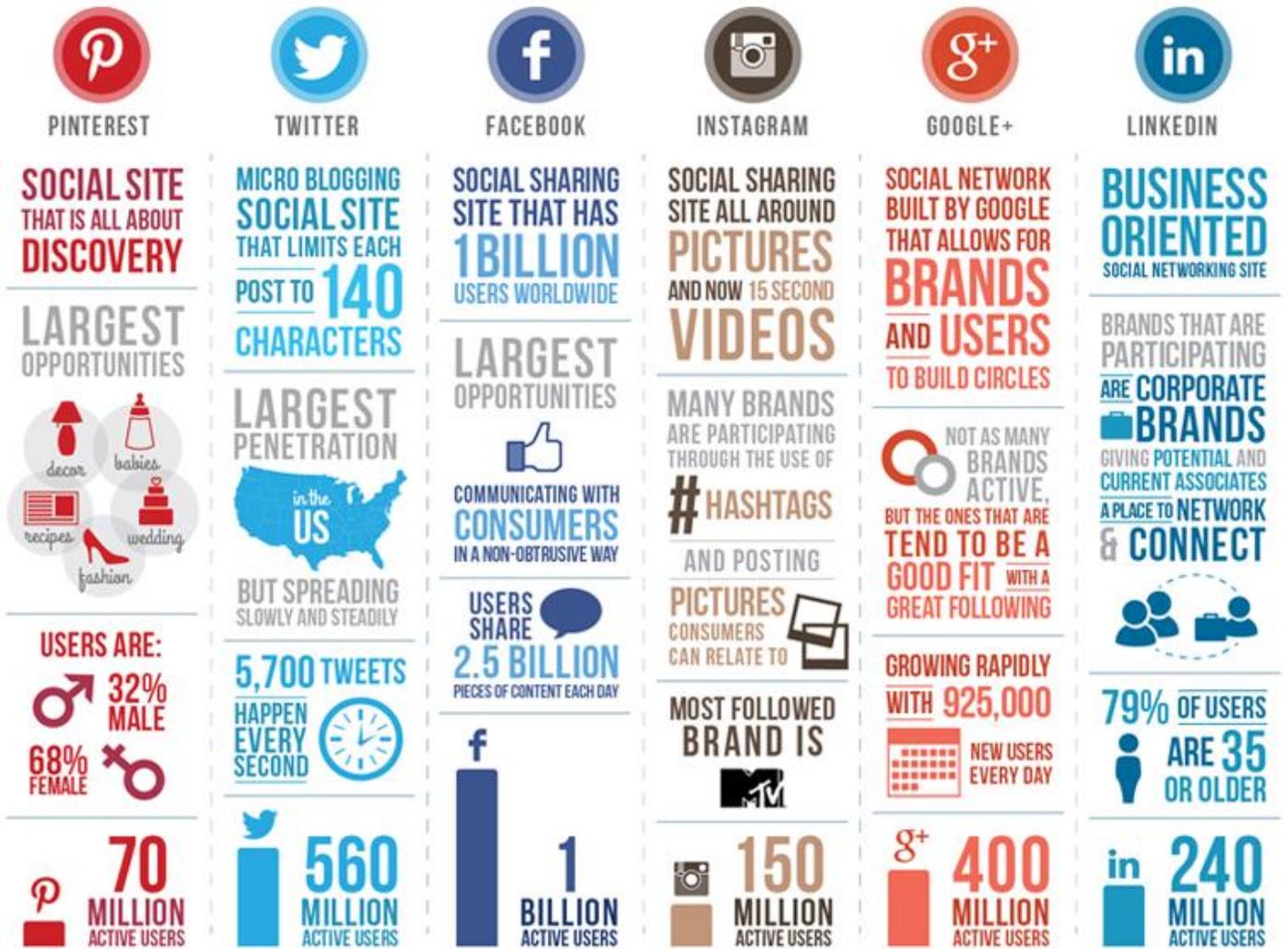
## 2. Introduction

Social media is defined as 'websites and applications which enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016).



A comprehensive list of social media platforms may be found online.

There are a multitude of uses for social media; most commonly, establishing wider and more diverse social and professional networks; spreading good practice and knowledge; sharing ideas; arranging events and posting comments – AAPT Council Members also 'live-tweet' or 'live-post' certain events and meetings.



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Equally, but less frequently, there may be a need to engage with ‘mainstream’ or ‘traditional’ media, such as television, radio, newspapers or magazines. The increased public interest in the area of forensics and related professions over the past decade or so has driven a corresponding increase in APTs being asked to participate in programmes and articles in a wide range of online and offline media.

Engagement within the profession, and the wider public, can be an extremely positive thing – AAPT have two official Twitter accounts (@AAPTtweets and @AAPTCouncilNews) and a Facebook group – but there are pitfalls. This policy is designed to supplement members’ common sense with a governance framework that will, hopefully, help avoid any problems for individual members or the AAPT as a whole.

### 3. Social Media and Your Employer

Due to the public and immediate nature of social media, the potential exists for both positive and negative engagement. Many organisations, therefore, are now issuing clear policy statements on what is permissible behaviour when using social media, limiting for example, its use for social purposes to non-working breaks. However, policies may also state clearly what employees or members can say about their organisation **even outside of work or official duties** (Institute of Biomedical Science, 2014).

Inappropriate use of social media may:

- Breach your organisation's internet policy
- Breach your organisation's harassment policy
- Damage your employer's reputation in such a way as to constitute a breach of your employment contract, leading to disciplinary action and possible dismissal

If you are unsure about your employer's social media policy please contact your Manager or HR department.

Whilst concerns regarding social media are nothing new – in November 2011, the *Guardian* reported details of 72 actions carried out against NHS staff for 'inappropriately' using social media (Guardian News & Media, 2011) – the current near-ubiquity of social media means that the topic is now much higher up on the agenda of public sector HR Managers.

Members must exercise good judgement when posting on social media, as the consequences for misuse, in or out of work, can be severe.

## 4. Social Media – Officially, on behalf of AAPT

Access to AAPT's official social media accounts is strictly limited, for example; only Council Members and Honorary Officers have access to post on @AAPTTweets and @AAPTCouncilNews, and all posts to the official Facebook page are vetted by a small group of moderators before being posted.

Members posting on official social media accounts must not use the accounts to create or endorse (e.g. like, link, retweet, share, etc.) anything that is, or could reasonably be considered to be, offensive, discriminatory or otherwise inappropriate. This includes events, pages, comments or articles that are, or could reasonably be considered to be, sensationalising or trivialising death and bereavement for entertainment and/or other non-scientific-based purposes.

Any member found to be in breach of the above will have their access to all official social media accounts removed and will be subject to the procedure described in section 7 of this policy.

## 5. Social Media – Personal Use

AAPT does not seek to curtail its members' enjoyment of social media, or limit their right to freedom of speech – indeed, the debate on whether or not there should be a limit to free speech will likely continue for some time (Debating Europe, 2015).

Nevertheless, APTs must be mindful of the fact that they are in the privileged position of serving the widest possible range of citizens of the UK and elsewhere. It is, of course, a fact that everyone currently alive will die, regardless of their age, physical or mental ability or health, gender, marital status, maternal status, race, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or any of the other characteristics that make human beings so diverse – the profession must, therefore, take great care not to cross the line between fair comment and unacceptable conduct.

APTs must also be mindful of the fact that, although death is something they face each working day, for a large proportion of the public this will be their first experience of bereavement. This extends to the wider public, such as those present on social media, so great care must be taken not to appear flippant, derogatory or derisory towards the subject.

Examples of this include commenting on features of a case (extent of trauma, smell, insect infestation), even in a non-identifiable way, or complaining about their work (being on-call, being called out *again* when there's something they'd like to watch on TV) – at best it makes the APT look unprofessional; at worst, it's possible that someone who knows the deceased will see the posts and great upset could be caused.

Note: it is often not the original post, but the subsequent liking or sharing of a post by friends that can cause the problem

This line is, by its nature, subjective and very difficult to define and, again, AAPT has no interest in being an arbiter of good taste in members' personal lives, however, we are committed to taking action in situations where we deem this line has been crossed by our members and our ethical principles have been breached by any offensive, discriminatory or otherwise inappropriate posts on social media. It's important to note that not everyone shares the same tastes, and that just because one person finds something distasteful it does not necessarily follow that others will agree – we will take an appropriate, fair and proportionate view in the application of this policy.

Unless it has been discussed and approved by Council in writing, members must not implicitly or explicitly state AAPT involvement, approval, endorsement or support for **any** activity, in any social media post. Requests for such approval should be directed to Council who will make a judgement against the criteria used to judge posts on its official social media accounts (as described in section 3 above).

## 6. '*Mainstream*' or '*Traditional*' Media – Officially, on Behalf of AAPT

AAPT receives requests to participate in a range of projects. When evaluating such requests, the integrity of the association, its members, and the wider profession must be protected.

Any request by media outlets, media organisations or individual journalists for official contribution to **any** project will be evaluated by Council and, if agreed, assigned to the most appropriate AAPT member. An official contribution may be defined as a direct contribution by an AAPT representative who will be identified as such during the programme, article, etc.

Under no circumstances will a member identify as either an AAPT representative or member during a programme, article, etc. without the prior permission of Council.

Any AAPT representative or member so authorised by Council must identify as an 'Anatomical Pathology Technologist' during the programme, article, etc. – incorrect job titles such as '*Mortuary Assistant*', '*Mortuary Technician*', '*Mortician*', etc. are misleading and must be avoided.

The AAPT representative or member must ensure that AAPT is given sight, and reasonable editorial control, of the programme, article, etc. well before its publication or transmission. If this condition is refused, AAPT will withdraw support from the project in question and will not participate and/or endorse it in any way.

## 7. ‘Mainstream’ or ‘Traditional’ Media – Personally

As described in section 4 above, AAPT has no interest in curtailing its members’ enjoyment of the media, limiting their right to freedom of speech, or in being an arbiter of good taste in members’ personal lives, however, we have an expectation that members will take all reasonable steps to uphold the dignity and integrity of their profession whilst engaging with the media, even if in a personal capacity.

Engaging with the media can be problematic, with common pitfalls including mis-quoting, mis-representation, and inaccuracy. In order to protect themselves against such issues arising, AAPT would advise APTs to adhere to the following guidelines:

- Agree in advance the parameters of the interaction, setting out both sides’ expectations in terms of opportunities for reviewing material in advance of its publication or transmission – at the very least, insist on having sight of the material with enough time to request changes to be made
- Make it clear from the outset that you will require this opportunity for review as a condition of your participation, and that you will withdraw your permission if this condition is not met
- Check the material carefully for factual accuracy and appropriate language and tone – if in doubt, advice can be sought from AAPT
- If related to your employment, make use of your Trust or Local Authority Press Officer, who can often be a valuable source of information and support

It is in the interests of both parties and the wider public to develop a good working relationship, as the material may deeply affect those that read or view it (for instance if they have recently been bereaved or suffer a bereavement shortly afterwards), so early agreement is essential.

Please remember that, as described above in section 4, members must not implicitly or explicitly state AAPT involvement, approval, endorsement or support for **any** activity, in any social media post. Requests for such approval should be directed to Council who will make a judgement against the criteria used to judge posts on its official social media accounts (as described in section 3 above).

AAPT reserves the right to challenge any published or transmitted material, both directly with the creator of the material in question and with the member responsible, if the material is judged by AAPT to be inaccurate or inappropriate.

## 8. Company Members

Company Members must be mindful that their responsibilities under this policy extend to the text and images they use in any promotional material and/or social media posts. Such text and images must be appropriate, non-sensationalist and professional at all times. When featuring on official media, AAPT reserve the right to request that text and/or images are removed or modified as necessary.

## 9. Governance of Policy

This policy forms part of the code of conduct that members agree to adhere to upon taking membership of AAPT.

Potential breaches of this policy will be investigated in the first instance by the Executive (Chair, Vice-Chair, President, Treasurer, Secretary), who will gather all relevant information and prepare a report for full Council. Council will then discuss the matter and decide, by a majority vote, whether a breach has occurred. In the event of a tied vote, the Chair shall have the casting vote. If the member in question is a Council Member or Honorary Officer, the same process shall apply, but without the involvement of the person under investigation.

If a breach is found to have occurred, the following sanctions are available to Council:

- **Verbal warning** – this would apply in very minor cases, or where the incident did not constitute a material breach of the policy, but rather could lead to further action if the behaviour continues / escalates. This first stage is designed to be more ‘friendly advice’ than actual sanction, in the hope that the member will subsequently refrain from further inappropriate behaviour
- **Written warning** – this would apply in cases where there has been a minor or moderate breach of the policy, or where repeated verbal warnings have not prevented the member from continuing to breach the policy. Such warnings will remain ‘active’ for one year and will be taken into account if further breaches occur. After one year, the warning will be removed from the member’s record
- **Removal from co-opted positions, committees and registers** – this would apply in cases where the incident is considered to have cast sufficient doubt on the member’s judgement to render continued participation in official duties inappropriate. For example, the member could be removed from the register of External Assessors for the Level 3 Diploma in APT
- **Expulsion from the AAPT** – This sanction would apply in cases where the incident is of sufficient severity to make continued membership of a professional association such as the AAPT untenable and inappropriate. In such cases, the ex-member does have the right to reapply, with Council reserving the right to refuse any such application as it sees fit.

In serious cases, Council reserves the right to report the matter to the relevant regulatory body.

## 10. References

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