



Australian Government  
Department of Employment

# Personal Use of Social Media Policy

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## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. This Policy provides guidance for employees when using social media in a personal capacity. This policy sets out how to use social media in a manner consistent with requirements of Australian Public Service (APS) employees responsibilities and obligations to comply with the APS Values, Code of Conduct and Employment Principles.

## 2. Date of effect

- 2.1. This policy is effective from January 2015.

## 3. Application

- 3.1. This policy applies to all Departmental ongoing and non-ongoing employees. Any concerns about the behaviour of independent contractors will be dealt with in accordance with the terms and conditions of the contract under which they are engaged.

## 4. Legislative framework

- 4.1. This policy is underpinned by the following documents:

- a) [APS Code of Conduct](#)
- b) [APS Values](#)
- c) [APS Employment Principles](#)
- d) [APSC Circular 2012/1: Revisions to the Commission's guidance on making public comment and participating online](#)
- e) [IT Security Policy.](#)

## 5. What is social media?

- 5.1. Social media refers to web-based technologies that allow you to easily publish, share and discuss content. This content can be in a variety of formats and may include text, pictures, audio and video.

- 5.2. Some common forms of social media include:

- social networking (e.g. Facebook, MySpace)
- video/photo sharing (e.g. YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat)
- blogs
- microblogging (e.g. Twitter, Yammer)
- online forums/groups (eg Whirlpool)
- wikis (e.g. Wikipedia)

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- collaborative tools on the intranet
- discussion boards

## 6. Personal Use of Social Media

- 6.1. Departmental employees, like other members of the community, have the right to freedom of expression, but this is subject to the public maintaining its confidence in the Department to deliver services fairly, effectively, impartially and courteously. If this ability is compromised or is perceived to be compromised, the reputation of the Department and/or the APS as a whole is weakened.
- 6.2. The same principles apply to online comment as to any other kind of public comment and employees are held accountable to the APS Code of Conduct.
- 6.3. The Public Service Act requires that APS employees at all times behave in a way that upholds the APS Values, and the integrity and good reputation of the Department and APS. This includes when employees engage in public comment in a personal capacity and requires them to:
  - treat people with respect and courtesy, and without harassment
  - be sensitive to the diversity of the Australian public
  - take reasonable steps to avoid conflicts of interest, and
  - not act in a way that would call into question their apolitical, impartial and professional performance.
- 6.4. In particular, it is not appropriate for employees to make comments in a private capacity that are, or could be perceived to be:
  - Being made on behalf of their agency or the Australian Government, rather than an expression of a personal view.
  - Compromising the APS employee's capacity to fulfil their duties in an unbiased manner. This applies particularly where comment is made about policies and programmes of the employee's agency.
  - So harsh or extreme in its criticism of the Government, a member of parliament from another political party, or their respective policies, that it raises questions about the APS employee's capacity to work professionally, efficiently or impartially. Such comment does not have to relate to the employee's area of work.
  - So strong in its criticism of an agency's administration that it could seriously disrupt the workplace. APS employees are encouraged instead to resolve concerns by informal discussion with a manager or by using internal dispute resolution mechanisms.
  - A gratuitous personal attack that might reasonably be perceived to be connected with their employment.
  - Unreasonable criticism of an agency's clients and other stakeholders.

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- Compromising public confidence in the agency or the APS.
- 6.5. When commenting in a personal capacity, employees should remember that ‘anonymously’ posted material can still be traced to a particular individual and will not abrogate responsibility for the material. Also, security settings don’t guarantee privacy and the ease with which online material can be replicated. Online material effectively lasts forever, maybe replicated endlessly, and may be sent to recipients who were never the intended audience, or who may view it out of context.
- 6.6. At all times when participating online in a personal capacity, Departmental employees must be mindful of requirements set out in Public Service Regulation 2.1 concerning their duty to not disclose information. To avoid breaching the regulations, employees should not publicly disclose or discuss information they have obtained in connection with their employment and should only discuss publicly available information.

*Note: Under section 70 of the Crimes Act 1914, it is an offence for an APS employee to publish or communicate any fact or document which comes to the employee’s knowledge, or into the employee’s possession, by virtue of being a Commonwealth officer, and which it is the employee’s duty not to disclose.*

## 7. Using social media during work time

- 7.1. The Department allows employees to make reasonable personal use of the internet and other Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources and this is applied to the use of social media sites such as *Facebook*. Generally ‘reasonable use’ means that it is acceptable to check social media for personal use during an employee’s personal time such as during lunch breaks. Unless authorised by the employee’s manager, it is not acceptable to keep social media pages for private use logged on and open through working hours. The use of social media on personal devices such as laptops or smart phones, as well as that on Department devices, should not be excessive to the point where it has an adverse impact on an individual’s work outputs.
- 7.2. What is ‘reasonable’ use will also be determined with reference to operational requirements, the workplace culture and whether there has been a history of inappropriate excessive personal usage of internet/social media within the workplace. Managers should also have regard to the perception created amongst the team and/or work area should employees engage in excessive or regular usage of social media activity during work times. Employees with supervisory responsibilities have an obligation to lead by example and model behaviour for other employees and limit their personal use of social media during working hours.

## 8. Managing inappropriate personal comment or use of social media

- 8.1. Managers who identify that the personal use of social media is interfering with an employee's work obligations, or has created an adverse perception amongst the work area, should raise their concerns with the individual(s) involved. These observations should be documented and discussed with the employee and may need to be progressed through the Department's performance management framework. If the manager is satisfied that the personal use of social media during work time is inappropriate, the manager should communicate their expectations of internet and other ICT resources in the workplace to the individual or team. Managers are encouraged to review the situation within a reasonable timeframe. Instances where individuals or teams fail to comply with management instruction should be reported to the Performance, Learning and Wellbeing Team for guidance or further action as required.
- 8.2. Social media websites are public forums. Employees posting inappropriate comment or material, including imagery, on such sites could be at risk of breaching the APS Code of Conduct.
- 8.3. Employees who observe suspected breaches of the APS Code of Conduct arising from online participation should report it to their manager, consistent with their obligations under the APS Values and Code of Conduct.
- 8.4. All APS employees are required to comply with the Code of Conduct, including to at all times behave in a way that upholds the APS Values and Employment Principles, and the integrity and good reputation of their agency and the APS. A breach of the Code of Conduct can result in sanctions, ranging from a reprimand to termination of employment.

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Policy Owner	WR, HR Policy and SES
Document Status	Final
Point of Contact	Director, WR, HR Policy and SES People Branch, People and Communication Group Telephone: (02) 6121 6798
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Approval Authority	Branch Manager, People Branch Department of Employment
Date of Approval	June 2015

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The document must be attributed as the 'Personal Use of Social Media Policy'.



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Communication

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**Social Media**

Last Modified On: 4/06/2015 3:34 PM

The Department manages a number of social media presences including Twitter and Facebook accounts.

Content and monitoring of social media accounts is managed within the relevant programme areas except for the Department's official Twitter account which is managed by the Communication Branch.

The Social Media Policy explains the Department's expectations of staff when participating in social media and demonstrates how our values should be applied in the social media environment.

**Using Social Media**

To develop an official social media 'presence' you must first fill out the Social Media Plan Template. The [Programme Communication team](#) will review the plan and assist you as required to get your social media presence up and running.

Follow the links below to useful information about using social media to support your work.

- Twitter
- General guidance for Employees Making Public Comment
- Social Media Monitoring
- Department of Employment Personal Use of Social Media Policy
- Risk Guide

Please contact the [Programme Communication Team](#) if you have additional questions.

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## Twitter

Last Modified On: 9/04/2015 4:41 PM

The Programme Communication team manages the Department's Twitter account @EmploymentGovAu.

The Twitter account provides the Department with the opportunity to promote policies, engage with the community and distribute content.

The Twitter feed includes content relating to both employment and workplace relations and covers the range of the Department's policies and programmes. Content for posting includes:

- News, announcements and alerts to new content on websites
- Messages about events (including alerts and photos)
- Programme messages
- 'Did you know' statistics, sector trends and information from relevant publications
- Retweets of media releases, speeches and other content
- Retweets of content relevant to employment and workplace relations, including from other Australian Government accounts, as appropriate.

If you have suggested tweets or topic ideas please submit these to the Twitter inbox. Tweets will be checked by the Programme Communication Team for consistency and tone and edited if required. If submitting tweets, please provide approval at the EL2 level or above and be sure to advise if any specific timing is required.

When drafting tweets remember:



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People

Employment > Resources > People > People Service Site Pages > Makingpublicstatements

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## Guidance for Employees Making Public Comment

Last Modified On: 24/04/2015 10:19 AM by HESS,Fiona | Contact: CACHIA,Loretta

All APS employees are required to comply with the Code of Conduct, including to at all times behave in a way that upholds the APS Values, Code of Conduct and Employment Principles, and the integrity and good reputation of their agency and the APS.

This means that your conduct during your own personal time could affect your employment with the Department. This includes any comment you may make in a public forum which could apply to online activity.

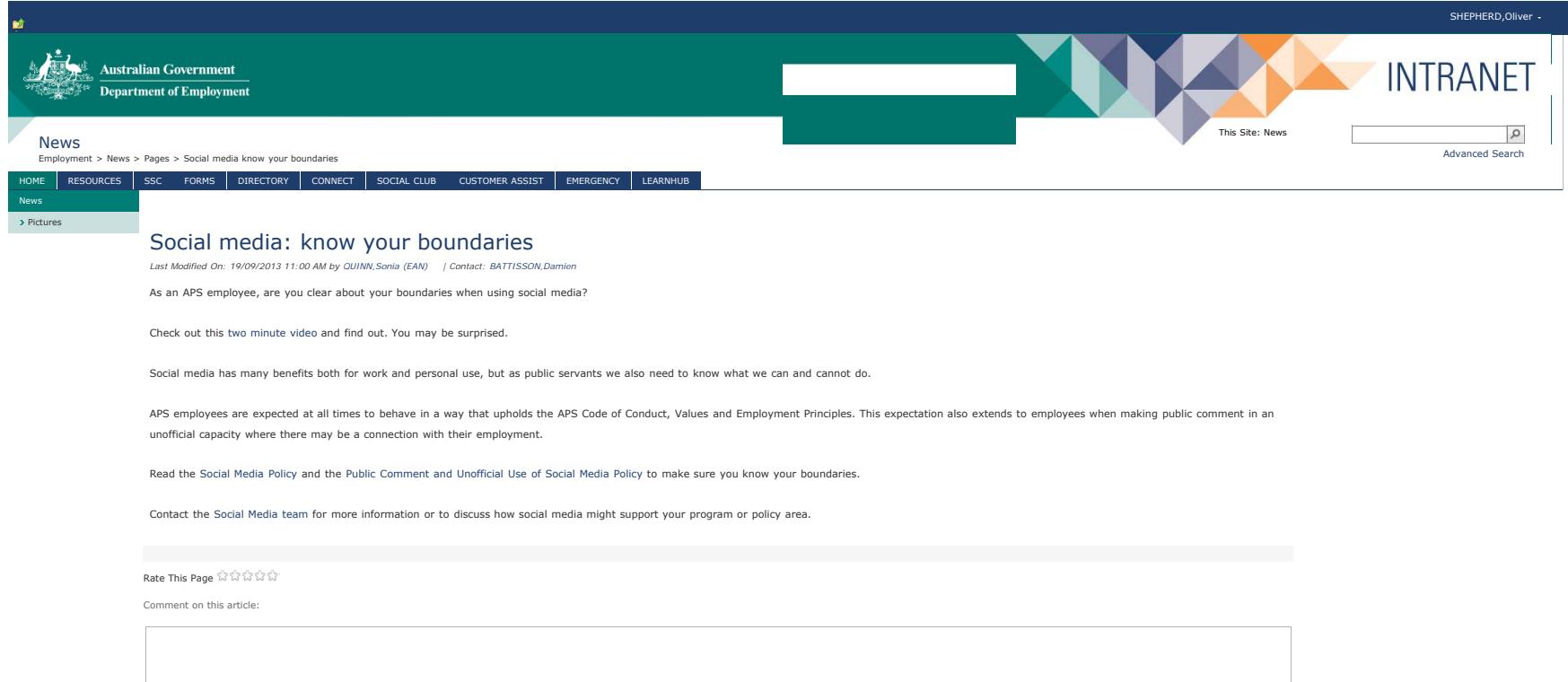
**Personal Use of Social Media Policy**  
The Department of Employment Personal Use of Social Media Policy provides guidance for employees when using social media in a personal capacity. This policy aims to inform employees about their responsibilities and obligations to comply with the APS Values, Code of Conduct and Employment Principles and how to use social media in a manner consistent with requirements of APS employees.

**Making public comment**  
'Public comment' is a broad term that encompasses comments made on current affairs in a public forum. Examples include, but are not limited to, public speaking engagements, during radio or television interviews, letters to the press or contributions to blogs and other public forums on the internet.

**Making public comment in an official capacity**  
APS employees, acting as part of their official duties, may need to provide comment to the media and others in the community about agency activities and programmes, to explain the operation of a government policy, or as the chosen 'public face' of their agency.

**Making public comment in a personal capacity**  
Other than in their capacity as an APS employee, there are two ways in which employees may wish to make public comment – in an official capacity and/or a personal capacity.

APS employees may wish to make public comment in a personal capacity, so long as they make it clear they are expressing their own views and presented in a way that does not adversely impact on the good reputation of the Department or APS, or compromise their ability to serve the government of the day in an impartial manner.



The image shows the Australian Government Department of Employment Intranet homepage. The header features the Australian Coat of Arms and the text "Australian Government" and "Department of Employment". A decorative graphic of overlapping triangles in teal, grey, and orange is on the right. The word "INTRANET" is prominently displayed in large white letters. The top navigation bar includes links for "HOME", "RESOURCES", "SSC", "FORMS", "DIRECTORY", "CONNECT", "SOCIAL CLUB", "CUSTOMER ASSIST", "EMERGENCY", and "LEARNHUB". A search bar with the placeholder "This Site: News" and a "Advanced Search" link is also present. The main content area has a green header bar with "News" and "Pictures" links. The main article title is "Social media: know your boundaries". Below it, a note says "Last Modified On: 19/09/2013 11:00 AM by QUINN,Sonia (EAN) | Contact: BATTISON,Damien". The article text discusses social media boundaries for APS employees, mentioning the APS Code of Conduct, Values and Employment Principles, and the expectation for public comment in an unofficial capacity. It also links to the Social Media Policy and Public Comment policy. A "Rate This Page" section with five stars is shown, along with a comment input field.

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Advanced Search

News

Employment > News > Pages > Social media know your boundaries

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News

> Pictures

## Social media: know your boundaries

Last Modified On: 19/09/2013 11:00 AM by QUINN,Sonia (EAN) | Contact: BATTISON,Damien

As an APS employee, are you clear about your boundaries when using social media?

Check out this two minute video and find out. You may be surprised.

Social media has many benefits both for work and personal use, but as public servants we also need to know what we can and cannot do.

APS employees are expected at all times to behave in a way that upholds the APS Code of Conduct, Values and Employment Principles. This expectation also extends to employees when making public comment in an unofficial capacity where there may be a connection with their employment.

Read the Social Media Policy and the Public Comment and Unofficial Use of Social Media Policy to make sure you know your boundaries.

Contact the Social Media team for more information or to discuss how social media might support your program or policy area.

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