Reading u3a Social Media Policy

Purpose

'Social media' refers to websites and applications ('apps') that allow people to create, share and respond to user-generated content (such as text posts, photos and video). The policy sets out Reading u3a's overall approach to social media and identifies the procedures which will support the policy. It guides the Reading u3a trustees in establishing criteria for determining how the use of social media can be applied to further Reading u3a's charitable object and in designing procedures for its safe and effective moderation.

The policy is intended to ensure that, in its current and future use of social media, Reading u3a stays within the law and meets any requirements set out in its constitution or set by the Charity Commission. It provides guidance to trustees, group convenors and members on the management and use of any social media for which Reading u3a bears responsibility.

Context

There is an increasing expectation that organisations will have an online presence including using social media. Social media can be a powerful communication tool to raise awareness and to better engage current and future beneficiaries of charities such as Reading u3a, and it can help reach a much wider audience more quickly than traditional methods. But it can introduce risks such as posting content that is illegal, inappropriate or harmful, requiring procedures for managing those risks in order to protect the charity and its members. The Charity Commission therefore now expects that charities which use social media should have a social media policy.

Scope

The policy applies to applications which enable individual users to create, share and respond to content (words, images, sound and video) and network with each other. It excludes sites which are not used reciprocally, such as websites, and channels which are simple communication platforms such as email providers, WhatsApp and Zoom. Reading u3a expects to use social media in a variety of ways to further its purposes, which may include engaging with the members and the wider public directly about what Reading u3a is doing and intends to do in support of its charitable object.

The policy applies to Reading u3a trustees, group convenors and other members who use or are planning to use social media on behalf of Reading u3a or in connection with one of Reading u3a's activities. It covers both public pages and private groups for which Reading u3a has responsibility and establishes criteria which can be applied to future platforms which are not yet available.

Where appropriate this policy should be used in conjunction with other Reading u3a policies, specifically:
- the Complaints policy in relation to (internal and external) complaints linked to use of social media and identifying how to put things right if something has gone wrong
- the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy in relation to requirements to consider what reasonable adjustments can be made in order to facilitate participation by those with a protected characteristic as defined in the policy
- the Privacy policy in relation to responsibility for secure use of personal data and following data protection principles
- the Safeguarding policy in relation to any potential or actual form of harm, abuse or neglect relating to social media use and to providing an environment which is safe.

Principles

Reading u3a acknowledges both the potential value of social media and the need to establish rules and guidance for minimising risks. Its use of social media will

- be consistent with effectively achieving its charitable object
- be consistent with its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy, Privacy policy and Safeguarding policy
- seek as far as possible not to disadvantage or exclude members who are unable to use or choose not to use the internet or social media, by using additional means of communicating essential information
- remain within the law and respect copyright and other permissions
- seek to prevent the posting of offensive or harmful content
- be managed and monitored solely by moderators approved by the trustees
- seek to eliminate the risk of any reputational damage to Reading u3a or to the u3a movement more generally.

Criteria for determining when and how social media and other online sites can show the Reading u3a name or logo will be determined solely by the trustees. The Committee will take action against sites claiming to be affiliated to Reading u3a without the express agreement of the Committee.

Procedures

1. Managing social media within Reading u3a

While the trustees will have overall responsibility for Reading u3a's use of social media, for the day-to-day management of the process the Committee will appoint one trustee (with a deputy if appropriate). The social media trustee will work with and oversee the moderators selected for each of the social media sites and will report to the Committee as appropriate.

2. Social media initiated by the trustees

When considering how any communication may most effectively be achieved, the trustees will assess whether social media could be used for this purpose as an effective and safe means, either alone or in conjunction with other means. Such communication might relate to advertising activities, to recruitment and to providing ways in which members can contribute to activities or decision making (for example by sharing information, opinions, knowledge, news items, memories or experiences). The trustees should ensure that the choice of social media platform and the way it is used are appropriate to the purpose of the communication and are consistent with the principles set out in this policy. Where appropriate, the trustees may choose to use social media sites moderated or managed by other organisations. If no appropriate sites are available, the Committee may set up their own site and will appoint at least 2 moderators (who need not be trustees) to manage and moderate it.

3. Social media initiated outside the Committee

If groups or members wish to use social media directly linked to a Reading u3a activity they should obtain authorisation from the Committee. Requests should be made in writing and show the purposes, the platform, who will have access, who can post and the proposed moderators (at least two). Normally these will be private groups rather than public pages and access will be restricted to Reading u3a members. Only when the Committee has approved

the proposal will the group or member be entitled to refer to the site as being a Reading u3a site.

Groups may set up their own rules for the use of their group site as long as these do not contravene any 'umbrella' rules established by the trustees.

4. What social media should not be used for

The trustees should discourage the use of social media for simple messaging, whether to individuals or groups, where this can more effectively be achieved through email or a similar channel. For significant messages (for example those relating to changes in membership, fees, dates of activities) social media must not be the only channel and the trustees must ensure that the information reaches members who do not use social media by other channels.

In general, Reading u3a branded sites should not be used to share third party content or reshare from other sites outside the u3a movement; however, this restriction would not normally apply to content provided by the Third Age Trust or other u3as, nor to non-u3a educational content directly relevant to the group's activities. Reading u3a sites should not be used for posting about wider issues, especially if controversial or of a religious or political nature, nor for commercial advertising or promotion. The trustees should ensure that sites bearing the Reading u3a name or logo are used solely to further Reading u3a's charitable object.

5. Moderators

The trustees will ensure that no social media site will be authorised without there being two approved moderators nominated by whoever has proposed setting up the site (who may also be one of the nominated moderators). Moderators are expected to be familiar with social media and with the principles and guidance set out in this policy. They will be accountable day-to-day to the social media trustee (see Procedure 1 above) who will report to the Committee as appropriate. The social media trustee may recommend to the Committee that one or more moderators should be removed, which may lead to a site being temporarily inactive until a new moderator is appointed.

The social media trustee will recommend to the Committee a procedure for recruiting volunteers to become moderators. This is expected to require some sort of training or familiarisation, which should include safeguarding, diversity and inclusion issues (following Reading u3a's policies). Assistance from the Third Age Trust might be available for this.

6. Allowing access

In the case of public pages, read-only access is normally available to anyone. The trustees will decide if certain actions are to be restricted, for example by not allowing posts or comments by any user other than the moderators, which will be the default position.

For private groups set up by Reading u3a groups or members, in their proposal to the Committee the group convenor or member will set out who can access, post or delete.

7. Preventing the use of illegal or inappropriate material

The trustees will develop a set of rules (or a code of conduct) which will, of necessity, evolve as the use of social media increases. The rules will cover, amongst others:

- the use of copyright material – using or adapting someone else's images or written content without permission or, where permission to reproduce content has been given, failing to acknowledge the source or author
- the use of pictures which include individual members (in line with the Privacy policy)
- unacceptable vocabulary and when moderators should consider the use of auto-moderation and spam blockers
- libel – defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups
- posting content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual especially if relating to a protected characteristic (in line with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy)
- breaching confidentiality – disclosing information meant for internal use only or information that the source is not ready to disclose.

8. Monitoring the use of social media

The social media trustee will oversee the monitoring of the sites by the moderators. If they identify misuse (see Procedures 4 and 7 above) of any of the Reading u3a sites by members, this will be reported to the Committee. Minor incidents will be dealt with informally; for more serious misuse the Committee will follow the Procedure set out in the Complaints policy, steps 8 (Formal procedure – levels of action) and 9 (Formal procedure – gross misconduct).

If the Committee is made aware that unauthorised submissions have been made to non-Reading u3a sites using Reading u3a's name or logo, it will take steps to stop this. This will count as misuse and, if perpetrated by a Reading u3a member, the procedure set out above (using steps from the Complaints policy) will be applied.

9. If something goes wrong

If a complaint is made through a Reading u3a social media channel, the Complaints policy will be applied.

If issues arise on social media which can escalate into a crisis situation or risk serious damage to the charity's reputation, it is essential that this is brought to the Committee's attention as rapidly as possible and that action is taken by the Committee. Appropriate action may include:
- if inappropriate material gets through, sending apologies to the individual or organisation affected
- making a corrective public statement
- closing the site on which the content was posted
- taking action against any members involved following the procedure set out in the Complaints policy (see Procedure 8 above)
- if potentially criminal activity or a serious safeguarding issue is suspected, reporting the incident to the police
- considering whether the incident should be reported to the Charity Commission and/or the Third Age Trust.

Roles and responsibilities

The trustees will be responsible collectively for the implementation of this policy, bearing in mind that this is a new field and adjustments will need to be made as lessons are learnt. As set out in Procedure 1, the Committee will appoint a trustee (or trustees) to be the first point of contact on social media requests and to manage the relationship with moderators.

The social media trustee will: oversee the moderators selected for each social media site and, when appropriate, recommend that they be replaced; recommend a procedure for recruiting volunteers to become moderators; identify what sort of training or familiarisation should be made available to moderators; report to the Committee on any breaches or potential breaches of this policy.

The Groups Coordinator will ensure that group convenors are made aware of the requirements of this policy if groups use, or propose to use, social media in connection with their u3a activity. Group convenors are responsible for identifying and appointing moderators and informing the Committee.

Where a contentious issue arises, especially if potentially a safeguarding or reputational concern, for which moderators need a rapid response, they should refer to the Chair in the first place. The Chair will then raise the issue with the wider Committee if appropriate.

Monitoring and review

Given that this is a new policy area and that there are frequent developments in social media, to keep the procedure effective and appropriate it will initially be reviewed by the Committee every six months. A full review of the policy and procedure will be undertaken by the Committee at the end of two years, following which the frequency of future reviews will be agreed.

Adoption

Adopted by Reading u3a Committee on: 19 February 2024
Reviewed on: 17 November 2025

Next review due: November 2026