



# THE BIRMINGHAM & MIDLAND INSTITUTE

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*Charity No. 522852*

## COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY & POLICY

### Introduction

All good comms strategies, start by marrying the needs of the organisation with that of the audience, so that both may be met as much as possible. Engaging with members, the wider-community and businesses in the area of operation is key to the success of any organisation and The Birmingham & Midland Institute is no exception to this rule.

For many organisations, raising awareness is the end goal rather than the first step on the ladder to much deeper – and wider - audience engagement.

There is often a failure to take a more strategic approach to comms – or a failure to properly communicate such a need to internal stakeholders, such as the Board of Trustees. It is important to note that it is the Board of Trustees, the executive body of the institute, who may delegate operational matters to individuals or teams, or committees, but at all times it retains overall responsibility for what the institute does and anything done is essentially done in its name.

But how do you convince stakeholders, senior decision-makers and budget controllers that a comms strategy really is worth the investment?

From time to time, our objectives will change and vary from raising money and providing services to campaigning, research, advertising events and generally raising awareness of what is going on at the institute, especially with the transformational changes planned for the next 5 years.

Forward-thinking charities – the ones investing time and resources into their strategic frameworks – are showing that it's possible to achieve so much more. Having an up-to-date website that is easily navigable, looks good and tells people what they want to know is a key part of comms strategy.

If we want our colleagues to change the way they think, feel and behave, we need to approach the challenge in the same way we would with external stakeholders, by figuring out effective ways to communicate to change their hearts and minds.

This is why we need to have a clear Communication Policy, using all of the tools in our armoury, not just to engage with our members, but with the wider world, to build networks and tell the world what the BMI is about.

### What is Social Media?

Social media is the term given to web-based tools and applications which enable users to create and share content (words, images and video content), and network with each other through the sharing of information, opinions, knowledge and common interests. Examples of social media include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. There is a Social Media Policy in place for staff, but the Board of Trustees needs to embrace Social Media, as ambassadors of the BMI, and as Guardians of Purpose of its objectives. Regular e-mail newsletters are good to stay in touch with our members too.

### Why do we use Social Media?

Social media is essential to the success of communicating the BMI's work. It is important for some staff, volunteers and trustees to participate in social media, to engage with our audience, participate in relevant conversations and raise the profile of the BMI's work.

### Why do we need a Communications Strategy & Social Media Policy?

The difference between a personal and professional opinion can be blurred on social media, particularly if you're discussing issues relating to the BMI's work. While we encourage the use of social media, we have certain standards, outlined in this policy, which we require everyone to observe. Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary in the public domain.

This policy is intended for all staff members of all levels, volunteers and trustees, and applies to content posted on both a BMI device and a personal device. Before engaging in work-related social media activity, everyone must read this policy and additionally staff must read the Social Media Policy too.

### Setting out the Social Media Procedures & Policy

This policy sets out guidelines on how social media should be used to support the delivery and promotion of the BMI and the use of social media by staff in both a professional and personal capacity. It sets out what you need to be aware of when interacting in these spaces and is designed to help staff support and expand our official social media channels, while protecting the charity and its reputation and preventing any legal issues.

### Point of contact for Social Media

The Board of Trustees has resolved that the people responsible for co-ordinating the day-to-day publishing, monitoring and management of our social media channels will be:

Name	Team
James Fletcher (trustee)	Digital Content Team
Stephen Hartland (trustee)	
Samina Sadia (trustee)	
Dan Parsons (officer)	
George Davies (volunteer) - Webmaster	

If you have specific questions about any aspect of these channels, speak to one of these people. No other person may post content on the BMI's official channels without the permission of the Board of Trustees.

### Which social media channels do we use?

The BMI uses the following social media channels:

Website: [www.bmi.org.uk](http://www.bmi.org.uk)

Used for general information about the institute and to allow people to join.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/thebirminghamandmidlandinstitute>

62% of Senior Citizens aged 65+ are on Facebook; 72% of 50-64 year olds; 84% of 30-49 year-olds; and 88% of the 18-29 age group are on Facebook, so it is a platform that reaches across all age demographics.

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/bmi1854>

Twitter is a blogging and social networking service on which users post and interact with messages known as "tweets". There is a 280 character limit, so that tweets must be concise. The BMI has 1,770 followers.

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/birmingham-and-midland-institute/about/>

LinkedIn is professional networking platform. All trustees should consider using LinkedIn as ambassadors for the BMI.

Instagram: *Not currently set up*

Instagram is a photo and video-sharing social networking service owned by Facebook.

## Guidelines

### Using the BMI's Social Media Channels — Appropriate Conduct

1. Any communication to members, whether by e-mail, letter or other means may be signed by the writer, but must always have the addendum "For and on behalf of the Board of Trustees"
2. The Digital Content team is responsible for setting up and managing the BMI's social media channels. Only those authorised to do so by the Board of Trustees will have access to these accounts and it is important to note that anything officially communicated is always on behalf of the trustees, howsoever delegated.
3. The hours that digital content will be added are as follows:

Name	Hours	Platform
Approved Webmasters	Weekly	Website
Dan Parsons, Samina Sadia	08:00 – 14:00 hrs	Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn Instagram
Stephen Hartland, James Fletcher	14:00 – 22:00 hrs	
As agreed	Weekends	

4. Be an ambassador for our brand. All staff, volunteers and trustees should ensure they reflect the BMI's values in what they post and use our tone of voice. Our brand guidelines set out our tone of voice that all staff should refer to when posting content on BMI's social media channels.
5. Make sure that all social media content has a purpose and a benefit for the BMI and accurately reflects the BMI's agreed position.
6. Bring value to our audience(s). Answer their questions, help and engage with them.

7. Take care with the presentation of content. Make sure that there are no typos, misspellings or grammatical errors. Also check the quality of images and that there are no copyright issues.
8. Always pause and think before posting. That said, reply to comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate.
9. If staff, volunteers or trustees outside of the Digital Content team wish to contribute content for social media, whether non-paid for or paid for advertising, they should seek approval from the Board of Trustees.
10. Staff, volunteers or trustees shouldn't post content about supporters or service users without their express permission. If staff are sharing information about supporters, service users or third party organisations, this content should be clearly labelled so our audiences know it has not come directly from the BMI. If using interviews, videos or photos that clearly identify a child or young person, we must ensure they have the consent of a parent or guardian before using them on social media.
11. Always check facts. No one should automatically assume that material is accurate and should take reasonable steps where necessary to seek verification, for example, by checking data/statistics and being wary of photo manipulation.
12. Be honest. Say what you know to be true or have a good source for. If you've made a mistake, don't be afraid to admit it.
13. Staff should refrain from offering personal opinions via the BMI's social media accounts, either directly by commenting or indirectly by 'liking', 'sharing' or 'retweeting'. If you are in doubt about the BMI's position on a particular issue, please speak to a member of the Digital Content team.
14. It is vital that the BMI does not encourage others to risk their personal safety or that of others, to gather materials. For example, a video of a stunt.
15. Staff should not encourage people to break the law to supply material for social media, such as using unauthorised video footage. All relevant rights for usage must be obtained before publishing material.
16. Staff, volunteers or trustees must not set up other Facebook groups or pages, Twitter accounts or any other social media channels on behalf of the BMI. This could confuse messaging and brand awareness. By having official social media accounts in place, the Digital Content team can ensure consistency of the brand and focus on building a strong following.
17. The BMI is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. We have every right to express views on policy, including the policies of parties, but we can't tell people how to vote.
18. If a complaint is made on the BMI's social media channels, staff should seek advice from the Digital Content team before responding. If they are not available, then staff should speak to the Honorary Secretary.
19. Sometimes issues can arise on social media which can escalate into a crisis situation because they are sensitive or risk serious damage to the charity's reputation. Examples would include

anything that is contrary to our Policies or where legal action might ensue. The nature of social media means that complaints are visible and can escalate quickly. Not acting can be detrimental to the charity.

The Digital Content team regularly monitors our social media spaces for mentions of the BMI, so we can catch any issues or problems early. If there is an issue that could develop or has already developed into a crisis situation, the Digital Content team will convene a meeting, whether face to face, by conference call or digital group conversation to determine the solution in the quickest possible way. Afterwards it will communicate the matter (problem, solution and actions) to the Board of Trustees.

If any staff outside of the Digital Content team become aware of any comments online that they think have the potential to escalate into a crisis, whether on the BMI's social media channels or elsewhere, they should speak to the Honorary Secretary immediately.

### **Use of Personal Social Media Accounts — Appropriate Conduct**

1. The BMI's Social Media Policy, in force since February 2019, applies to all staff, volunteers and trustees. Please ensure you are aware of it.
2. It must be re-iterated that the BMI is not a political organisation and does not hold a view on party politics or have any affiliation with or links to political parties. When representing the BMI, staff, volunteers and trustees are expected to hold the BMI's position of neutrality. Staff and volunteers who are politically active in their spare time, or trustees engaged in politics, need to be clear in separating their personal political identity from the BMI and understand and avoid potential conflicts of interest.
3. Never use the BMI's Coat of Arms or unless approved to do so by the Board of Trustees. It is important to note that Grants of Arms to organisations are only available to be used by the Board of Trustees. Permission to use the BMI's Coat of Arms should be requested from the Honorary Secretary.
4. The Board of Trustees encourages staff to share tweets and posts that have been issued by the BMI. When online in a personal capacity, you might also see opportunities to comment on or support the BMI and the work we do. Where appropriate and using the guidelines within this policy, we encourage staff to do this as it provides a human voice and raises our profile. However, if the content is controversial or misrepresented, please highlight this to the Digital Content team who will respond as appropriate.

### **Further Guidelines**

#### **Libel**

Libel is when a false written statement that is damaging to a person's reputation is published online or in print. Whether staff, volunteers or trustees are posting content on social media as part of their job or in a personal capacity, they should not bring BMI into disrepute by making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups.

## **Copyright law**

It is critical that all staff, volunteers and trustees abide by the laws governing copyright, under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. Never use or adapt someone else's images or written content without permission. Failing to acknowledge the source/author/resource citation, where permission has been given to reproduce content, is also considered a breach of copyright.

## **Confidentiality**

Any communications that staff make in a personal capacity must not breach confidentiality. For example, information meant for internal use only or information that the BMI is not ready to disclose yet. For example, a news story that is embargoed for a particular date. Please refer to the **Confidentiality Policy** for further information.

## **Discrimination and Harassment**

Staff should not post content that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, on either an official [*charity name*] social media channel or a personal account. For example:

- making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief
- using social media to bully another individual
- posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content

## **Lobbying Act**

Charities are legally allowed to campaign to bring about a change in policy or law to further their organisational purpose. In most cases, spending on charity campaigns that are in accordance with charity law will not be regulated under electoral law. However, the Lobbying Act, which was passed in January 2014, states that during national elections (known as regulated periods) spending on campaigning activities may be regulated.

Charities which spend more than £20,000 in England or £10,000 in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, during the regulated period, need to register with the Electoral Commission. To abide by the Lobbying Act, campaigning activities on social media must not be seen as intending to influence people's voting choice. During these periods, all campaigning activity will be reviewed by the Digital Content team.

## **Use of Social Media in the Recruitment Process**

Recruitment should be carried out in accordance with the **Equal Opportunities Policy** and associated procedures and guidelines. Vacancies are shared routinely on LinkedIn.

There should be no systematic or routine checking of candidate's online social media activities during the recruitment process, as conducting these searches might lead to a presumption that an applicant's protected characteristics, such as religious beliefs or sexual orientation, played a part in a recruitment decision. This is in line with the BMI Equal Opportunities Policy.

## **Protection and intervention**

The responsibility for measures of protection and intervention lies first with the social networking site itself. Different social networking sites offer different models of interventions in different areas. For more information, refer to the guidance available on the social networking site itself. For example, Facebook. However, if a staff member considers that a person/people is/are at risk of harm, they should report this to the Honorary Secretary immediately.

### **Under 18s and vulnerable people**

Young and vulnerable people face risks when using social networking sites. They may be at risk of being bullied, publishing sensitive and personal information on their profiles, or from becoming targets for online grooming.

Where known, when communicating with young people under 18-years-old via social media, staff should ensure the online relationship with BMI follows the same rules as the offline 'real-life' relationship. Staff should ensure that young people have been made aware of the risks of communicating and sharing information online, and given guidance on security/privacy settings, as necessary. Staff and volunteers should also ensure that the site itself is suitable for the young person and BMI content and other content is appropriate for them. Please refer to the BMI Safeguarding Policy

### **Responsibilities and Breach of policy**

Everyone is responsible for their own compliance with this policy. Participation in social media on behalf of the BMI is not a right but an opportunity, so it must be treated seriously and with respect. For staff, breaches of policy may incur disciplinary action, depending on the severity of the issue. Please refer to the Disciplinary Policy for further information on disciplinary procedures. Staff who are unsure about whether something they propose to do on social media might breach this policy, should seek advice from the Digital Content Team or the Honorary Secretary.

### **Public Interest Disclosure**

Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, if a staff member releases information through BMI's social media channels that is considered to be in the interest of the public, the BMI's Whistleblowing Policy must be initiated before any further action is taken.

To be read in conjunction with Policies:

Confidentiality Policy  
Equal Opportunities Policy  
Disciplinary Policy  
Social Media Policy

Approved by the Board of Trustees: 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Next Review Date: April 2021