

No Space for Hate: Creating a healthy social media space at National Conference

Why the focus on social media?

We're proud to create democratic spaces for student representatives and activists to come together to debate issues about education, society and the wider world that are relevant to students and students' unions and to elect their national officers and committees for the year ahead.

We want all delegates to have a positive experience - whether your preferred candidates win or lose their election, whether the motions you support pass or fail - the experience should be a good one, where people can express their views, hear the views of others and grow, develop and learn. And yet, we know all too often debating, agreeing and disagreeing is not an easy experience in the student movement, particularly over NUS National Conference.

From information and data that we have collected recently, we know that the culture of our political spaces can mean people do not want to engage. This is because it impacts on their wellbeing and ability to participate free from prejudice.

In recent years, social media has added a new dimension. Whilst it is overwhelmingly a force for good, it is used in ways that are deeply problematic. Whether that is delegates themselves, or people joining in the debate from afar, when there is tension in the physical space - which is of course to be expected at times - the added heat from social media can make it unbearable for many.

How to behave on social media

The NUS' Code of Conduct policy sets out the behavioural standards we expect from delegates in order to create safe, accessible and inclusive spaces at our events that are free from discrimination, harassment and prejudice.

Social media is a huge part of National Conference and, as such, anything you post, comment on, retweet or like during the event is part of the overall delegate experience. It's also a 'shop window' for our movement where the world will look in and form a view - our reputation as a movement should inspire others to want to get involved in our amazing work, not put them off.

As National Conference Delegates, you've all signed up to say you will adhere to this policy, so make sure you are familiar with it: <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/governance/nus-code-of-conduct>

Examples of unhealthy social media under this policy could include:

- Making comments that are bullying, harassing or discriminatory against someone
- Posting remarks which deliberately cause offence and constitute unlawful discrimination, harassment and/or victimisation
- Posting or uploading inappropriate comments, images, photographs and/or video clips about other delegates, election candidates or NUS staff
- Ridiculing someone for their lack of knowledge about national Conference, motions or political issues
- Publishing defamatory and/or knowingly false material about delegates, election candidates or NUS staff members
- Engaging in discussions on anything which may contravene NUS' equality and diversity policy
- Use of offensive, derogatory or intimidating language which may cause offence

To be honest, it's really straightforward. It's just about recognising that it's ok for people to have different opinions and we should and can be conscious in how we challenge this and put forward alternative views, without prejudice and by not making it about any individual person or their identity. We can agree or disagree – that's politics and why we are a democracy! And we can do this respectfully.

How can you help?

At last year's National Conference, there were over 50,000 tweets on twitter alone using the official event hashtag. Add into the mix alternative hashtags, Facebook posts and other social media sites and it's clear that keeping an eye on social media is a tough gig for NUS – Over 1000 attendees who are interacting with social media throughout the conference gives us the means to keep an eye on social media together and create the online culture we want ourselves and others to see when they look into our virtual space.

If you spot something that you think goes against creating a healthy space on social media during conference, here's what you can do:

If it's from another attendee at National Conference (or you're not sure who they are) pop over to the Info Point desk and report it to us. We'll take it from there by reviewing it and taking appropriate action, which could range from feedback to the attendee, a request to remove the content or more formal action under our Code of Conduct policy, which could result in being removed from conference.

If it's from another person or an anonymous account, use the reporting tools within Twitter, Facebook and other social media sites to report the content as offensive and/or inappropriate. The providers take reports seriously and will remove offensive content whilst they investigate it further.

Seven Top Tips for Delegates

Here are some things to consider to help you use social media in a positive and inclusive way during National Conference:

1. Think before you post

When you see something you don't like on social media, take a step back from your newsfeeds for a moment and consider whether it's really worth responding to. Then, if it is, think what would be the most useful, insightful and positively-impactful response that will either change that person's mind or move the debate forward constructively.

2. Remember you're being watched

You may not be in the Big Brother house, but your tweets and posts are definitely being watched. Not just by the members you represent, but also by colleagues, stakeholders, key players in your institution, partnership organisations, the media, friends, family and those you're trying to influence. This isn't about censorship, but about sensibility and being mindful about the impact of your words.

3. What goes online stays online

What you post online is emboldened in history forever and may get shared with lots of other people, for both good and bad reasons. Be mindful of this when posting updates.

4. Talk to NUS staff & volunteers

NUS staff and volunteers are here to help make conference a good experience - if you have concerns about the venue, rooms etc. go to the info point. Lots of people take to social media to complain about things that are best taken to an NUS member of staff who will be able to help or explain a situation or point you in the right direction to get the support you need.

5. Use social media for good

Look at the world with kind eyes - you can use social media to talk about the good things too! How about telling the world about the things you like too?

6. Look after yourself

National Conference doesn't have to be 24/7 - you are entitled to some downtime too, so don't feel you have to be available - on or offline - 24 hours a day. Is arguing online worth your while or are there better things you could be doing offline? You could read a book, watch TV, socialise, chill out, eat, sleep - switching off is really important and it will help you to maximise your participation in conference activities and keep you switched on when it counts the most.

7. Don't say it online if you wouldn't say it in person

This one speaks for itself.