

# Use of social media: guidance for RICS members

Version 2 with effect from 1 September 2024

The use of social media has become an integral part of the personal and professional lives of many, and serves as an important professional resource to share information, develop business opportunities and network with others.

Most members use social media professionally, respectfully and responsibly. Often members and firms can avoid issues by thinking about how they would react if the comment was about them or a family member, or how a potential future client or future employer would perceive a post if they came across it.

This guidance is intended to help RICS members and regulated firms understand how the Rules of Conduct apply to the use of social media, and what RICS will take into account when concerns about social media use are reported to us.

Social media use includes posting, sharing or commenting on material online, on social media sites like Facebook, WeChat, LinkedIn, TikTok, Instagram, Weibo or X, or on content sharing sites like YouTube. The principles set out in this guidance also apply to public statements made in other places like individual websites, community forums, etc. They will also be relevant to other forms of communication including, for example, posts in group chats on apps like WhatsApp or Telegram.

Social media use in a member's professional capacity is most likely to be relevant to RICS but social media use in a personal capacity can impact public confidence in the profession and could therefore be considered by RICS as a regulator.

This guidance is separate from and does not affect RICS' moderation policy for its social media platforms that set out where it may choose to remove comments: [Social Media User Generated Content Moderation Guidelines](#).

### Relevant sections of the Rules of Conduct

Several sections of the RICS Rules of Conduct are relevant to how members and firms should use social media use.

- **Rule 1** Members and firms must be honest, act with integrity and comply with their professional obligations, including obligations to RICS.
- **Rule 4** Members and firms must treat others with respect and encourage diversity and inclusion.
- **Rule 5** Members and firms must act in the public interest, take responsibility for their actions and act to prevent harm and maintain public confidence in the profession.

In particular **example behaviour 5.3**: Members and firms ensure that public statements made by the firm, or in which members are (or could be) identified as members of the profession, do not undermine public confidence in the profession.

## What will RICS consider when concerns about social media use are raised?

RICS will consider any concerns about social media use in accordance with our usual processes and our [Regulatory Decision-making Guidance](#).

Members of RICS and regulated firms are likely to want to use social media to network with others, promote their businesses, comment on issues and engage in debate. The use of social media engages the right to freedom of expression under [Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights](#) (ECHR).

Article 10 is a qualified right that must be balanced against the other rights protected by the ECHR, including the rights of others. This document provides guidance on how RICS will balance these rights and apply our Rules of Conduct.

In joining, RICS members and regulated firms have agreed to uphold the values and requirements set out in the Rules of Conduct.

Where RICS is assessing concerns about a member or firm's social media use it will consider a number of factors. Below is a non-exhaustive list of factors that may be relevant to whether social media use is in breach of the Rules of Conduct, depending on the particular circumstances and evidence in each case:

### Whether the content is dishonest or misleading

Content that is untrue or inaccurate is likely to damage public trust in the profession. Members should take care to check the source and accuracy of information they share online, and correct themselves if they have posted false or misleading information. Members should also think about whether a public comment could be misinterpreted as a professional opinion instead of personal comment, and may need to distinguish clearly between them.

### Whether the content is discriminatory

Content that is discriminatory may demonstrate an attitude towards certain groups (particularly minority or vulnerable groups) that might indicate how the member or firm may deal with people from that group in their professional life. Discriminatory content damages public confidence that people in those groups will get a fair and professional service from that individual, and potentially damages confidence in the profession as a whole if discriminatory content is believed to be tolerated.

## How closely connected the content is to professional life

Content in which you are identified as a professional is more likely to be relevant for regulatory purposes. However, content posted in a personal capacity that is connected to your professional activities or workplace, or which is likely to reflect how you behave in a professional capacity, may also be relevant. Liking or sharing content could also give rise to allegations of conflict of interest where a member is in a role which needs to demonstrate independence and objectivity.

## The way in which the content is expressed

In order to comply with Rule 4, members and firms should express their views in a professional and respectful way. Content that is abusive or aggressive, bullies or harasses an individual or a group of individuals, is intended to intimidate or provoke a response through frequent or large numbers of negative posts, or involves gratuitous attacks or threats, is likely to be a breach of the Rules of Conduct.

## Whether the content is confidential or private

Sharing data that should be confidential to clients or inappropriately sharing private information about other individuals is likely to damage public confidence in the profession and may demonstrate a lack of integrity.

## Case studies

We have included some case studies as illustrations of how we might approach circumstances. They are purely illustrative and whether we take disciplinary action in similar cases will depend on careful analysis of the evidence in each case.

**An RICS trainee posts on LinkedIn that they hold an RICS qualification that allows them to value properties unsupervised and that they have worked for a well-known property firm. Both claims are false.**

In this case we would take into account that this content is directly connected to the individual's professional life in that it is making claims about competence and employment. The content has also been posted in a public forum. We would also consider whether the content was dishonest and/or misleading. It is likely that this content would be relevant to us as a regulator.

**An RICS member responded to an Instagram post making allegations about an abusive ex-boyfriend, saying that she had also dated him and had also been mistreated. The man in question claims that these allegations are false and complains to RICS. He says that he knows the person is an RICS member because he has found her on LinkedIn with a similar photo.**

In this case we would take into account that this content is not directly connected to the member's professional life, although it has been possible to identify her as a member. We would be unable to determine whether the content was true. We would take into account that this is a single post, and carefully consider the rights of the member to freedom of expression balancing them with the rights to reputation of the person complaining. It is less likely that this content would be relevant to us as a regulator.

**An RICS member is in a dispute with a solicitor who serves on their local council over a planning committee decision the solicitor was involved in. The solicitor posts around once a week on LinkedIn about a variety of topics. Over a period of several months, every time the solicitor posts on LinkedIn about any subject the member makes insulting comments about the solicitor and the decisions he makes as a councillor, claiming that he is incompetent, stupid and biased.**

In this case we would take into account that these posts are made on a professional networking site and so connected to the member's professional life. We would also consider the way in which the content was expressed – the frequency, personal abuse and commenting on posts unrelated to the individual's work as a councillor would be relevant. Although we would take the right to freedom of expression of the member into account, this content may amount to bullying and harassment. It is therefore more likely to be relevant to us as a regulator.

**An RICS member frequently posts endorsements for a particular construction company on his social media. He consistently recommends this company for construction projects in his professional advice to clients.**

In this case, we would take into account that the member's relationship with the construction company is directly connected to his professional life as it involves referrals. We would consider whether there is evidence that this may not be, or may not be seen as, an impartial recommendation (for example referral fees or other benefits for the member) and the endorsement may therefore mislead members of the public or his clients. It is likely that this content would be relevant to us as a regulator.

**An RICS member posts on her personal Facebook account following a loss by the football team she follows making racist comments about members of the team. She runs a local surveying firm and her photograph and name appear on that firm's website as a chartered surveyor.**

We would take into account that this content has been posted on a private forum and is not connected to the member's professional life although she can probably be identified as a member. We would also take into account that this content is discriminatory and would give rise to concern about how the member would treat clients. It is likely that this content would be relevant to us as a regulator.

**An RICS member posts a comment on X responding to a news article about the actions of a foreign government in which he is highly critical of the actions of that government and the country's armed forces.**

In this case we would take into account that this content is posted in a public forum and would consider the profile of the person in considering whether this content is connected to their professional life. We would also take into account the member's right to freedom of expression and the protection that applies to political speech. This content is less likely to be relevant to us as a regulator.



## Delivering confidence

We are RICS. As a member-led chartered professional body working in the public interest, we uphold the highest technical and ethical standards.

We inspire professionalism, advance knowledge and support our members across global markets to make an effective contribution for the benefit of society. We independently regulate our members in the management of land, real estate, construction and infrastructure. Our work with others supports their professional practice and pioneers a natural and built environment that is sustainable, resilient and inclusive for all.

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