

# Media Engagement, Public Utterances and Government Relations Policy

## Section 1 - Key Information

<b>Policy Type and Approval Body</b>	Governance - University Council
<b>Accountable Executive - Policy</b>	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Future Growth)
<b>Responsible Manager - Policy</b>	Director, Media and Communications
<b>Review Date</b>	1 July 2027

## Section 2 - Purpose

(1) This Policy provides direction for La Trobe University staff when either representing the University as an official spokesperson or when engaging media to express their professional or personal views. It also sets out the parameters for Higher Degree by Research (HDR) candidates making media comment when undertaking activities for, or on behalf of the University, or at the authority of the University.

(2) The Policy objectives are to:

- a. Define the parameters to represent La Trobe as an official spokesperson (including in the media and to Government Ministers, Members of Parliament, and Local Government officials);
- b. Define the parameters for staff and HDR candidates to engage with the media to express their professional or personal view;
- c. Support decision-making and planning processes when engaging media;
- d. Clarify the requirements for staff who officially represent the University to Government and Members of Parliament; and
- e. Clarify the requirements for all social media activity undertaken by staff, contractors and agencies representing La Trobe University in an official capacity when using social networking sites and Web 2.0 applications hosted either internally on University infrastructure (e.g. Yammer) or externally by third parties (e.g. Facebook or Twitter).

## Section 3 - Scope

(3) This Policy applies to:

- a. All campuses, including virtual University environments
- b. All staff
- c. All HDR candidates

## Section 4 - Key Decisions

Key Decisions	Role
Act as an official spokesperson for the University	Senior Executive Group (SEG) members
Authorisation of official University statements	Director, Media and Communications with approval by Vice-Chancellor (VC) or their SEG nominee
Responsible for statements that represent the view of the University that are conveyed to a Minister, Member of Parliament or senior officer in a government agency or department	Vice-Chancellor
Ensuring consistency in media messages and the ongoing evaluation and review of media engagement	Director, Media and Communications

## Section 5 - Policy Statement

(4) Only nominated staff are able to act as an official spokesperson for the University. This is typically only members of the Senior Executive Group. Any additional requests to act as an official University spokesperson for single or ongoing media engagement/interaction must be made through the Director, Media and Communications or Media Manager. Staff are not permitted to act as spokespersons for La Trobe University unless authorised to do so.

(5) In accordance with the [Protection of Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom Policy](#) staff who engage with the media in their specialised field of research expertise do not need to seek prior approval. Seeking advice and support from the Senior Media & Communications Manager is recommended. Staff who are engaging/interacting with the media in their professional capacity and particular field of study or research must take reasonable steps to inform the media that their comments are not representing the University's official view.

(6) Subject to any third party restrictions or as otherwise agreed with the University (including any confidentiality undertakings, publication restrictions, or acknowledgement requirements) HDR candidates who engage with the media in their particular specialised field of study or research do not need to seek prior approval, although it is recommended that this be discussed with their supervisor. Seeking advice and support from the Senior Media & Communications Manager is also recommended. Candidates who are engaging/interacting with the media in relation to their particular field of study or research must take reasonable steps to inform the media that their comments are not representing the University's official view.

(7) All staff and HDR candidates commenting outside of their specialised field of study or research must make it clear that a personal view is being expressed.

(8) Section 6 of the [La Trobe University Enterprise Agreement 2023](#) provides the commitments made by the University for Intellectual Freedom and Academic Freedom and should be referred to by staff as part of this policy.

## Section 6 - Procedures

### Part A - Official University Spokesperson

(9) It is the day-to-day responsibility of the University's Senior Media Manager and Director, Media and Communications and Media Manager to act as official University media spokesperson, working with the knowledge and approval of the Vice-Chancellor.

(10) Staff who are engaging/interacting with the media as an official spokesperson must take steps to obtain the

necessary prior authority, accurately represent the University's position on the topic and seek to protect the University's reputation and brand.

(11) Official University statements must be authorised by the Director, Media and Communications or Senior Media Manager with approval by the Vice-Chancellor or their Senior Executive Group nominee.

## **Communication with Government**

(12) The Office of the Vice-Chancellor retains responsibility for Government relations. Statements that represent the view of the University should only be conveyed to a Minister, Member of Parliament, Local Government CEO and/or Councillor, or a senior officer within a government department or agency, through the Vice-Chancellor or with the Vice-Chancellor's prior agreement.

(13) The Senior Executive Group have approved the Guidelines on engagement with governments, Members of Parliament and political candidates which is available via the [intranet](#). For any enquiries please contact the Office of the Vice-Chancellor via [vc@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:vc@latrobe.edu.au)

## **Part B - Official Social Media Accounts**

### **Authorisation**

(14) Before submitting a request for a new social media channel, a 'Social Media Account Strategy 1-Page form' must be completed. This form can be requested from the Social Media Manager, and should be submitted to the Social Media Manager on completion.

### **Look and Feel**

(15) Social media channels that officially represent La Trobe University (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, blogs et al) will use styling complementary to the University's branding and online style guidelines to the extent that this is technically feasible.

### **Integration**

(16) When planning content consider and integrate social media channels with all other available options. Consider intended audiences and their information delivery preferences and develop a communication strategy that uses the most appropriate and useful attributes of different communication tools/platforms.

### **Content Strategy**

(17) Consider the goals and needs of the audience – devise a content strategy and schedule.

- a. The best way to add value to an online community is to post relevant information on a regular basis (the frequency depending on the expectations of your audience).
- b. Do not post simply for the sake of it – if your posts are of no value or interest to the audience, the audience will disengage.
- c. Carefully consider the risks and benefits of responding publicly to any comments. For comments requiring a response, respond in a timely manner. Make sure you proactively manage spam, abusive posts or anything that may be damaging to the University's reputation. Contact the Social Media team for advice in circumstances where you are uncertain about the best course of action [socialmedia@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:socialmedia@latrobe.edu.au).
- d. Any social media channel using a language other than English must be regularly reviewed by an employee of the University knowledgeable in the specific language in line with the clauses of this Procedure.

## Accuracy

(18) Ensure that all content displayed is factually correct. (As an example, if someone posted a comment claiming that La Trobe University was ranked in the top 10 universities in the world, under the [Competition and Consumer Act 2010](#) this statement would need to be corrected or removed). Remove posts submitted by others if they are inaccurate or misleading.

(19) Avoid posting misleading or incorrect information about you or the University by checking facts before you post. If you make an error acknowledge it and move on. Do not try to revise history.

## Monitoring

(20) Social media channels that officially represent La Trobe University (or any part of the University) must be monitored proactively.

- a. Respond to posts/queries in a timely manner: the initial response should occur within 1 working day of receipt of a post.
- b. Remove posts submitted by others if they are inaccurate, abusive or misleading.
- c. Consider how the success of the channel will be assessed. Review performance against success measures regularly and tweak content based on audience interest and engagement levels.

## Transparency

(21) Always consider the content of your messages in the context of the intended audience. As its name suggests, social media encourages a more relaxed casual voice, however a more formal tone may be appropriate in certain circumstances.

- a. If you feel angry or stressed about a subject, delay posting until you are calm and clear-headed. The internet acts as a virtual global archive meaning once information is posted online, it is too late to recall or change it.
- b. Remember, all content, even direct and private messages, can become 'public' in the social media context.
- c. Be respectful of other people and their opinions. Even if you personally disagree with someone's opinion, remember that you are representing the University and respond in a polite and constructive manner.

## Privacy

(22) Be honest about who you are but also protect your and other's privacy. Do not divulge information that may compromise your professional confidentiality.

## Part C - Staff Comments to the Media

### Professional Views

(23) University staff are encouraged to take pride in their professional achievements and contribute to discussion in their professional field. While prior approval is not required, preferably all staff should talk to the Senior Media Manager or Media Advisors prior to engaging with the media. Media training courses are regularly offered by the [Media and Communications team](#).

(24) In situations where prior consultation with the Media & Communications team is not possible, staff are requested, as a courtesy, to inform the Senior Media Manager of the media engagement situation in which they were involved.

(25) Staff are required to take reasonable steps to inform the media that it is their professional viewpoint being expressed and that they are not the University's authorised spokesperson.

(26) HDR candidates are encouraged to take pride in their professional achievements and contribute to discussion in their professional field. While prior approval is not required, preferably all HDR candidates should talk to the Senior Media Manager or the Media Advisors prior to engaging with the media.

(27) The University will indemnify its employees and HDR candidates for any legal liability incurred by them while carrying out their employee or research responsibilities, provided they are undertaken in good faith. In these circumstances, the University will meet the costs of defending any action that might be taken against them personally as though the action had been taken against the University and any compensation/damages awarded against them.

(28) The above indemnity will also be subject to the University's insurance cover, for instance, no indemnity will be provided in circumstances where an individual makes statements that are knowingly false (in whole or in part), acts dishonestly or with malicious intent.

## **Personal Views**

(29) This Procedure is in accordance with the [Protection of Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom Policy](#) and the promotion of critical inquiry where a staff member or HDR candidate is expressing a personal view.

## **Part D - Responsibilities**

(30) Specific responsibilities are delegated as follows. The Director, Media and Communications is responsible for:

- a. Ensuring consistency in media messages
- b. Ongoing evaluation and review of media engagement as well as guidance and assistance to the Senior Media Manager

(31) The Senior Media Manager has overall operational responsibility for guidance, approval, implementation and management of media engagement/interaction.

## **Section 7 - Definitions**

(32) For the purpose of this Policy and Procedure:

- a. Brand: A brand is a collection of perceptions in the mind of the consumer. It is constructed over time and is influenced by the experiences of the consumer so there is a clear relationship between brand and reputation. Branding is the marketing term to describe the process of building a favourable image for a product, service or organisation that differentiates it, in the minds of the public, from competitors or other institutions.
- b. Higher degree by research: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), professional doctorates by research, and masters by research.
- c. Media: includes all media e.g. television, print, radio and electronic media (including the web, blogs, social media and new emerging mediums).
- d. Research responsibilities: means research activities undertaken by staff or students for and on behalf of the University, or at the authority of the University.
- e. Social media: The term 'social media' broadly describes Web 2.0 technologies that underpin the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Typified by channels such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn et al, social media enables people to communicate easily via the internet to share information and resources.
- f. Staff: includes employees, officers and contractors of La Trobe University.
- g. University: is La Trobe University.

## Section 8 - Authority and Associated Information

(33) This Policy is made under the [La Trobe University Act 2009](#).

## Status and Details

<b>Status</b>	Current
<b>Effective Date</b>	17th December 2019
<b>Review Date</b>	1st July 2027
<b>Approval Authority</b>	University Council
<b>Approval Date</b>	16th December 2019
<b>Expiry Date</b>	Not Applicable
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## Glossary Terms and Definitions

**"staff"** - Staff means any person employed by the University as per the definition in the La Trobe University Act 2009 (Vic).