



Accrington Stanley Football Club Social Media Guidance 2021/22

In line with the EFL's wider and ongoing work in various areas relating to social media, including the anti-discrimination campaigning, this document reflects Accrington Stanley's commitment to promoting the safe use of social media.

The absence of fans within stadiums as a result of the pandemic has led to an increased appetite for engagement among supporters, therefore meaning a greater need for Stanley to bring fans closer to the action.

This matter has also increased the importance of – and dependency on – matchday streaming, as we are able to broadcast fixtures live via the EFL's iFollow service. This has, in turn, brought about its own associated challenges and changed the focus of our social media output.

FA Guidelines

Accrington Stanley uses FA guidelines on inappropriate use of social media when planning, creating and posting content, and are responsible for all posts which are published to our official accounts, including historic posts which are later resurfaced. Posts shared or 'liked' by our accounts will be subject to the same guidelines and staff or players could be disciplined, even if they have not made the offensive comments directly.

Efforts are made to remove offensive or inappropriate posts at the earliest opportunity.

There are clear and obvious FA guidelines around what is not acceptable from our club or players on social media.

This list includes:

- Comments about the appointment of match officials.
- Implications of bias or a lack of integrity.
- Insults, threats, indecent or offensive comments made about anyone, including match officials.
- Discriminatory comments referencing ethnic origin, colour, race, nationality, religion or belief, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation or disability.

- Detrimental comments which bring the game into disrepute and are not judged to be in the best interests of the game.

The FA's Rules and Regulations are designed to strike a balance between allowing 'participants' freedom of speech while protecting the integrity and reputation of the game. However, if media comments or social media activity are deemed to breach FA Rule E3.1 it may consider changes.

NB: A 'participant' can be anyone employed by the club, including players and non-playing staff.

Online Abuse

For instances of online abuse on social media, Accrington Stanley will report via priority channels and mute/restrict/block the individual from the player and club accounts, while advising other players to do the same. We will inform the EFL when reporting an incident to any of the social media platforms in order for the EFL to keep a league-wide overview of the volume and frequency and will amplify any central messaging on tackling online abuse where possible.

We will report any illegal, discriminatory or threatening abuse to the police, who can pursue investigations. We built links with Lancashire Constabulary and identified a local hate crime office, Sue Moore, who assists us with establishing a clear process for reporting and subsequent investigations. Whether a victim wishes to pursue further action or not, Accrington Stanley will log incidents with the local force (and the EFL) so that accurate levels of incidence can be established.

Football's overriding objective is to ensure that real life consequences are forthcoming for those who post online hate.

Steps to Follow

Twitter

Reporting

1. Report any comment(s) that break guidelines using the platform's in-built tools, as well as through your Partner Support Portal for prioritised takedowns.
2. Mute and/or block the account(s) in question via priority channels, while advising other players to do the same.
3. Log the incident and inform the EFL.

Escalation

4. In instances of illegal, discriminatory or threatening abuse, report to the police.
5. Should the post not be swiftly removed, follow up with the platform's key contact(s).

6. If the incident involves any individual under the age of 18 or an adult at risk, a report should be made as soon as possible to the Designated Safeguarding Officer within your club.

Facebook/Instagram

Reporting

1. Report any comment(s) that break guidelines using the platform's in-built tools.
2. Restrict and/or block the account(s) in question via priority channels, while advising other players to do the same.
3. Log the incident and inform the EFL.

Escalation

4. In instances of illegal, discriminatory or threatening abuse, report to the police.
5. Should the post not be swiftly removed, follow up with the platform's key contact(s), as well as the EFL, who can escalate the issue in the Partner Support Portal.
6. If the incident involves any individual under the age of 18 or an adult at risk, a report should be made as soon as possible to the Designated Safeguarding Officer within your club.

Official Club Communications

Accrington Stanley will use a number of options available to us when considering an official response to instances of online abuse, which differ depending on the nature of the abuse, as well as the club's preferred platform and timing for official communications.

1. Immediate statement – a public condemnation of online abuse which also offer support for the player/staff affected. This may also include details of the offending post and steps taken to address the matter.
2. Delayed statement – if the incident is not the most egregious abuse or not in the public domain, or if the player/staff is wishing to remain anonymous – we may wish to follow the recommended reporting steps and produce a retrospective statement following any appropriate action taken. This may be a more considered response with fewer specific details.
3. Public social media support – we may wish to reference the incident solely on our official social media channels while reiterating the club's stance and offering support to the player/staff affected, i.e. without publishing an official statement.
4. We may wish to link to official EFL communications outlining its approach to online abuse.
5. No official communications – we may wish to deal with incident privately via official channels but within the private domain if, for example, it is at the request of the player/staff affected.

Ultimately, this matter remains at the discretion of Accrington Stanley Football Club with responses dependent on the case in question.

Player Support

Accrington Stanley recognises the emotional impact that online abuse can have on the individual victims and is committed to ensuring that those who suffer online abuse are able to access appropriate levels of support.

Players are encouraged to report abuse using the in-platform facilities. The PFA has been working hard to hold social media networks to account. Therefore, all platforms should take any post flagged by a professional player very seriously.

Though players shouldn't have to manage the abuse they receive online, there are tools available via the platforms to help control their social media experience. By blocking abusive accounts and muting inappropriate words and language, players can limit the offensive material targeted at them.

It is Accrington Stanley's duty of care to ensure an internal process is actioned when a player is the victim of online abuse, and players are offered practical support at this time via the club channels.

If a player needs direct emotional support due to online abuse, the PFA provides players with a counselling telephone helpline. This support is available to all players, who are encouraged to accept emotional support, given what we know about the impact abuse can have on an individual.

1. Through the initial call or email, the player will speak directly to a trained PFA employee, and the assessment process will begin.
2. The PFA team member will ask a series of questions designed to ascertain a fuller understanding of the client need and recommend the client for a programme of counselling.
3. If the recommendation is that the player should undergo a period of counselling, and the PFA member agrees to this, we will identify an approved counsellor from our network.
4. The chosen counsellor should be based no more than one hour's driving time from a member's home address. The member will be contacted within 24 hours for the counsellor to conduct a further assessment before the player agrees to undertake an initial series of counselling sessions. Online provisions are available.

The PFA consider social media an extension to the player's workplace and therefore will extend its support to employment and criminal disputes that could potentially arise through online abuse. It will continue to work to make social media a safer space for players alongside the

Government, police, while also working with clubs, EFL, Premier League, The FA, LMA and Kick It Out.

For further information on the wellbeing support available to players, please contact the PFA's Head of Player Welfare, Michael Bennett (wellbeing@thepfa.com or enough@thepfa.com).

PFA Online Abuse Helpline: 0800 368 8484.

Further information for players on Facebook/Instagram is available [here](#), via the platform's Athlete Safety Guide.

Best Practice

Social media in 2021 involves more platforms and functionality than ever before, and research indicates it is being used by an increasing number of people. As of 2019, 82% of the UK population had set up at least one social media account for personal use, with 97% of 16-24-year-olds in the UK using social media when online.

We will MAKE SURE we:

- Understand how we can use social media to benefit our club as a whole. Social media and digital as a whole is the best device to achieve club-wide objectives, not an individual ego trip.
- Identify the audience we are trying to reach and understand what they want from the club.
- Have a clear reason for using each social media platform and understand the ROI it gives us.
- Regularly analyse and improve performance.
- Distribute our best content through player, ambassadors and high-profile accounts.
- Follow EFL and FA guidelines on which topics to avoid on your channels.
- Talk to our fans and listen to them in return.

We will AVOID:

- Operating more social media accounts than our team can manage. Prioritise the platforms which suit our objectives as a club and only add a new platform into the mix if there is a clear reason for doing so.
- Thinking all engagement on social media is good engagement. It's easy to capture attention and get a reaction if that is all we are interested in.
- Counting our video views and not minutes watched. These figures should correlate.
- Posting the same content on all different platforms and expect positive results.
- Not listening to ideas for social media from all departments at our club, involving colleagues and explaining what the club is trying to achieve.

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- Assuming bigger clubs have an advantage creatively. The best ideas win, no matter what level you play at.

Engagement

An oft-neglected aspect of social media is taking the time to read comments from fans and reply or engage. Our media team are well versed in the mood and attitudes of supporters and do well to reflect this strategically. We make a genuine effort to communicate and be transparent.

The official social media accounts reflect our club's values.

Contacts

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