

Connecting Professional Recognition to LinkedIn

This article explains how maintaining our professional profile in LinkedIn can help us to maintain our professional standing as academics.

Introduction

Whatever your profession or occupation it is your peers who give you your professional identity, credibility and standing. Teachers in UK higher education now increasingly define their professional standing through professional accreditation using the UK Professional Standards Framework (HEA).

You are likely to already be an Associate Fellow, Fellow, Senior Fellow or Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. As fellows we are expected to 'remain in good standing' (RIGS). It is not enough to have met the threshold for fellowship once - we are expected to continually develop our professional practice and aspire to the next level of recognition.

Your social media professional persona

There are many social media spaces used by academics to represent their professional interests and expertise. Being online and social in this day and age is in itself a clear sign of your digital scholarship (Weller, 2011). You may have sites that represent you effectively as a professional and other sites where you like to be less formal. In addition to your professional use, you may also use social media for purely personal reasons.

Establish some rules for yourself about which persona is represented where. Many people establish multiple accounts in social media sites, for example on Twitter and Facebook, i.e. you might have 'work' and 'home' Twitter accounts.

LinkedIn is the exception here: you'll establish just one, good quality professional profile.

The dimensions of our practice

The UK Professional Standards Framework is organised around Areas of Activity, Core Knowledge and Professional Values. These dimensions help us to define and reflect on our professionalism. The different level descriptors (D1, D2, D3, D4) in the UKPSF provide us with a clear sense of how we should be pitching ourselves in terms of our professional outlook and presence. Both dimensions and descriptors, therefore, guide us in representing our teaching capabilities as we collect evidence of our professional practice and populate our online professional profiles.

With that in mind, here are some guiding principles for academics for representing our professional selves through social media, including LinkedIn.

Principles

Establish your 'digital toolbox'

Social media are various and one of their greatest strengths is how they can be connected to each other to establish an integrated digital toolbox. LinkedIn, even though it has a range of its own tools, can be used as your professional portal to your other online spaces.

The caveat to this strategy is that the automated proliferation of your content into your LinkedIn space will not discriminate between what is, or is not, professionally suitable. If you connect your Slideshare or WordPress blog accounts to your LinkedIn profile, for example, make sure your original postings are of the quality you would expect to see presented in LinkedIn.

Thinking aloud?

Social media and social networking allow us to be interactive with our peers. If you have a blog, for example, you'll know that it can be a fantastic space for positing emerging ideas in order to receive acknowledgement from your peers through comments on the blog or through Twitter. This provides us with a powerful digital paradigm for scholarly discourse. Open digital discourse is both a new form of scholarship - and one we are still learning about - and a more risky space given that it is a continually changing space and our understanding of it is still developing.

As a professional scholar you need to be clear about how open digital scholarship fits into your practice and how it may impact inadvertently, as well as beneficially, on expectations relating to your research profile and outputs.

The answer to this is, of course, to talk about these opportunities with your peers, professional associations, funding bodies, information specialists and line managers. As professionals, each of us needs to develop our own digital literacy.

Establish your digital literacy

Professionals using social media need their own strategy for using these media well. Your strategy will be defined by you with regard to common emerging good practice in your professional peer network. See the box outs 'Your social media professional persona' and 'Thinking aloud?'

Establish your professional profiling habit

Remaining in good standing requires you to keep your professional profile refreshed. This may require a shift in your thinking and in the time you need to regularly dedicate to maintaining your profile.

This shift, however, is not about you and social media: it is about you developing your habitual and critical engagement with your Continuing Professional Development and your scholarship of teaching and learning. Social media, and LinkedIn in particular, should make it easier for you to make this shift.

You now have access to social media spaces where you can share and remark on what you have done and what you have learnt whenever you go to a conference, read an inspirational article, design a research plan, or run an invigorating tutorial (etc.) as you build your RIGS evidence-base and reputation.

Manage your digital wellbeing

Following on from digital literacy and developing your habitual engagement, you need to pay attention to *redefining* the way you approach your engagement in good standing – not just adding to what you already do. Current studies in the UK highlight the importance of developing reasonable strategies to engagement with social media for learning and avoiding digital 'saturation' (Beetham, 2015).

Manage your professional profile

While *establishing* your online professional profile and developing evidence of CPD are both important, so is managing your profile. This is about critically reviewing your overall profile message. This review is something that may be more easily achieved with a buddy or mentor. What do they think your profile is saying about you? And what does their profile say about them?

Push your comfort zone

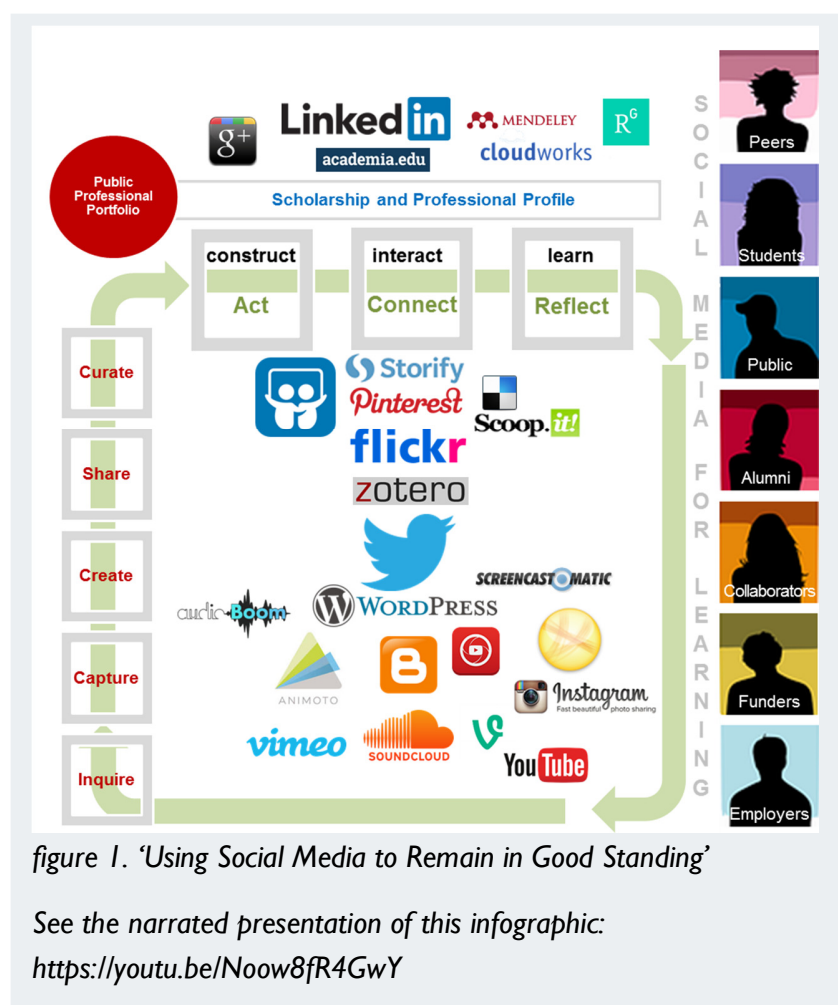
Most of us need to develop our use of social media for professional purposes. However, we need to use such spaces confidently and this means not taking undue risks.

If possible, work with colleagues to establish different levels for a good LinkedIn profile and social media presence. Try to define three quality levels for your team or subject group perhaps. For example a Basic Profile, Connected Profile, and Interactive Profile.

Key Social Media tools for continually refreshing your profile

You can use LinkedIn as a portal to your other online social media spaces.

The following graphic (figure 1. 'Using Social Media to Remain in Good Standing') is indicative of



the many social media that are used by academics for communicating, making, curating and sharing academic content.

It develops Beckingham's (2015) outline of the digital toolbox to support student Personal and Professional Development Planning. It explains why the idea of the Connect U is useful for academics to present themselves as active, connected and reflexive scholars: professional academics engaged in the digital and social age.

The top of the graphic represents the 'presentation layer' - the digital professional

portfolio. The graphic positions LinkedIn as the current *de facto* tool for any professional, but alongside LinkedIn there are logos for Google+, Academia.edu and other sites that may offer a more academic presence.

Google+ - represents the notion of the self-formed personal learning network (PLN)(Wilson et al., 2007). While Google+ offers the concept of self-defined ‘circles’ in which to associate through social media, the idea of the PLN proposes that an individual forms and is at the centre of their own constructed presence.

Research Gate and Academia.edu - these social media sites (along with Slideshare which is represented elsewhere in the diagram) allow academics to establish a presence around their scholarly outputs.

Cloudworks - comes out of UK higher education and is designed around discursive academic communities developing their scholarship through ‘cloudscapes’ (Conole, 2010).

Mendeley – is an online bibliographic tool and is placed in the portfolio part of the infographic to signal that many social media tools, such as those represented elsewhere in the diagram, can serve the purpose of socially mediated portfolio. Mendeley’s Group function allows groups to create bibliographic collections.

The right hand side of figure 1. sets out the social context informing the Connected U:

- **Our Peers** help us to establish our identity and our aspirations. They are the people whose opinions we respect and the people who know us as professional practitioners.
- **Our Students** are the people who expect us to challenge them and professionally model good practice as established professionals. They are also the people who have their own ways of navigating social media and who are likely to inspire us in terms of their view of the connected world.
- **Our Public** is an intentionally vague term, nevertheless it is an important one for us to consider in the Connected U. The ‘public’ remind us that our practice is open. If we position ourselves in open social spaces we need to consider the unexpected interest we may generate and we need to consider how we are representing our profession.



- **Our Alumni** are one step removed from us, but in the Social Age they are still usefully connected. As in all connected relationships, our connection with alumni remains bi-directional. We continue to support them by endorsement and association and they can support us by providing insight on our practice, by mentoring our students, and by providing insight to the professional lives of today's graduate.
- **Our Collaborators** may be any of the above, but in the Social Age they are ever-present - wherever they are actually located.
- **Our Funders**, both internal and external to our institutions are also more accessible than ever and we are more visible to them as our scholarship and presence is increasingly digitally mediated.
- **Our Employers** and the people who seek to employ our students are now co-located with us in this online social space. What does this mean to each of us in terms of how we manage of professional academic profiles?

The infographic, on the left hand side, sets out some professional social media behaviours. As professionals and scholars we,

- **Inquire** as we inform our practice;
- **Capture** our thinking and our actions in a full range of digital media;
- **Create** new representations of knowledge, skills and attributes as user-producers of digital and social media;
- **Share** and annotate what we find, assemble and create knowledge. As we do we create new meanings by sharing through different contexts;
- **Curate** the abundant information we accrue. This is perhaps one of the strongest skills of the Digital Age scholar who must now sift through and select the artefacts that best represent their practice.

The academic in the LinkedIn University, then, is Active, Connected and Reflective, always managing their presence. LinkedIn provides the interactive portfolio tool to help the academic establish, develop and manage their professional profile.



Key LinkedIn tools for continually refreshing your professional profile

Think about how you might develop your ability to produce effective posts, skills lists and portfolios with the support of others before moving to into the public sphere. Spend some time looking at how other academics represent themselves. Reflect on how effective you think they are.

On LinkedIn consider using the following,

- **Long-form posts** - LinkedIn users can create short article posts as well-written reflections on aspects of their practice. While great care needs to be taken with writing in a public and professional space, presenting yourself critically and confidently in social media is now an important professional skill. Reflect regularly on your practice and develop the habit of bringing these thoughts together into regular, focused posts. Finding writing foci around dimensions of the UKPSF can help you.
- **Skills** – Use the skills section on your LinkedIn profile to add up to 50 skills to your LinkedIn profile. Your connections can endorse you for your skills and you should also spend time endorsing them if you have experience of working with them.
- **Building a portfolio of examples** e.g. linking to Slideshare presentations, linking to documents you've produced, posters etc. A portfolio allows you to house everything in one place and build a commentary around your work (see figure 1).
- **Summaries** - The summary section on a profile requires real self-awareness. Ask people who know you well to give your profile an honest appraisal. Take their comments seriously and revise your summary accordingly.
- **Recommendations** i.e. the reference section. As well as adding weight to what you have said about yourself, recommendations can encourage you to develop your summary and to add further skills to your profile.

What are the alternatives to LinkedIn?

LinkedIn is unique in its broad coverage and reputation as the social media space for professional profiles. Its breadth may be regarded as a weakness by those who would rather be present in a specifically academic space.

There are discipline specific spaces of various types and you are likely to know best where these are. Talk to colleagues about the online spaces, including mail lists, Facebook Groups, Google+ circles, and so forth, they use. You want to be with the peers with whom you identify.

Consider for developing your academic professional presence in:

- Academia.edu
- ResearchGate.com
- Slideshare.net - bibliographic management tool with a social dimension
- Mendeley.com - a bibliographic management tool incorporating group tools
- Cloudworks – a professional social media forum

Sharing your reflections

Walz (n.d., p. 3) says,

Habits of thinking, the ability to take a critical approach to a problem and then choose and implement the right research strategy ... are more important than functional competency or facts.

When publishing the outcomes of your reflective practice, focus on your critical approach to reviewing and improving what you do.

Reflect specifically on your scholarly approach to teaching and developing your core knowledge. While you will do this by sharing examples of developing artefacts such as teaching materials and research papers, you must remember that your portfolio is first and foremost about you as a professional – what makes you tick?

Be clear about how you work, who you work with, how you reflect on, evaluate and enhance your practice.

The Professional Standards

Bear in mind the dimensions of the UKPSF (HEA) and ensure you bring out your involvement in designing your practice (A1), delivering your teaching (A2), assessing and giving feedback (A3), developing your learning environment (A4) and your scholarship and CPD (A5). Relate what you do to your core knowledge about teaching your discipline and your professional values. As you write or share your thoughts and artefacts, be sure that your postings represent you at your descriptor level. A Senior Fellow, for example, will consider the impact they make on their subject, department, and the university and how they do this through their experience and leadership.

References

- Beckingham, S. (2015). Providing students opportunities to develop professional digital and social media skills for ppdp. Online at: <http://bit.ly/1fKzBT0>
- Beetham, H. (2015). Thriving in a connected age: digital capability and digital wellbeing. Blog post, 25 June 2015. Jisc website. Online at: <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/blog/thriving-in-a-connected-age-digital-capability-and-digital-wellbeing-25-jun-2015>
- Conole, G. (2010). Book: Designing for learning in an open world. Online at: <http://cloudworks.ac.uk/cloudscape/view/2155>



HEA. The UK Professional Standards Framework. Online at: <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/professional-recognition/uk-professional-standards-framework-ukpsf>

Weller, M. (2011). The digital scholar: How technology is transforming scholarly practice. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Wilson, S., Liber, O., Johnson, M., Beauvoir, P., Sharples, P., & Milligan, C. (2007). Personal learning environments challenging the dominant design of educational systems. Methodologies & Scenarios, Journal of e-Learning and Knowledge Society, 3(2), June 2007, pp. 27-38.

A video explanation of the Connect U project is online at: <https://youtu.be/Noow8fR4GwY>

Written by Andrew Middleton

© The Higher Education Academy 2015