Using Social Media
Policy for Open University Students

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Introduction

This policy applies to you if you use social media in relation to your Open University studies, including the Open University’s official and unofficial channels, and public or closed / private social media networks (defined in section 2 below). The social media policy and other associated guidelines (see section 7 below) are designed to help you communicate safely and responsibly online. Your use of social media is governed by the same policies and procedures that apply to all aspects of being a member of the Open University community. It is your responsibility to read and act in accordance with the principles of this policy and other associated policies and guidelines (see Section 7 below). You must adhere to the policies and codes of conduct for each of the social media tools that you use.

Throughout this policy, when we say ‘student’, we mean that the policy applies to you from the point you register on your first course, module, Microcredential or qualification, throughout your time as an Open University student, including any time spent on approved study breaks or between modules (see Glossary).

Definition of ‘social media’

For the purposes of this policy, ‘social media’ is defined as websites and online applications that enable users to create and share content, and/or participate in social networking. These social media tools enable users to share ideas, opinions, knowledge and interests and use of them includes posting, commenting, instant messaging and sharing links, images and files.

Examples of such social media include, but are not limited to:

- Twitter
- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Pinterest
- Flickr
- Vimeo
- Blogs
- Online chat forums
- WhatsApp
- Snapchat
Guiding principles

In line with the Student Charter, the Open University’s mission and values, and the guidance set out in the Student Computing Policy, we have adopted a number of guiding principles for the use of social media:

- **Official Open University accounts are actively managed and monitored:** The Open University has a number of official social media accounts that are actively managed and represent the work and views of the institution. These include, for example, the main corporate ‘The Open University’ accounts on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. These accounts are monitored by staff, and any student posts, comments, questions or complaints are identified, assessed and responded to in a timely fashion.

- **Additional Open University accounts exist and will be managed in a similar way:** Faculties, schools, departments, groups, staff and teams may also operate social media accounts, both open and closed.

- **Public-facing references to The Open University will be monitored:** We monitor public-facing references to The Open University across social media including references or associations that could harm the University, its staff, individual students or groups of students. This could result in comments being hidden, accounts being reported or blocked, or disciplinary action.

- **Appropriate criticism is acceptable:** This policy does not prevent you from using social media to talk about your experiences or to express critical reviews appropriately. If you have a complaint, you should follow the Complaints Procedure.

- **Privacy and copyright laws apply to social media:** Content shared on social media is subject to the same privacy and copyright laws as other public channels. You should familiarise yourself with Open University policies and guidelines (see Section 7) and will be held personally responsible if found to be breaking the law.

- **Restricted use of The Open University logo and crest:** The Open University’s logo and crest may only be used on official, Open University-owned and -managed social media accounts. They should not be used in any other groups or accounts. Any requests to use the logo on social media should be sent to the Communications Unit (social-media@open.ac.uk). This is separate to any Open University ‘Twibbons’ or frames which can be used to demonstrate your association with The Open University.
• **Students and staff are not obliged to participate in social media**: Use of social media can come with both benefits and challenges and, as such, it is up to you to choose if and how you engage on social media channels. You should feel no obligation to accept an invitation to join a social media platform, group, or page, or to accept a ‘friend request’ related to The Open University or your studies, regardless of whether that invitation comes from another student, tutor or member of staff. Equally, staff are under no obligation to participate in social media activities so you should not assume a member of staff will communicate with you in that way.

**Your responsibilities**

When using social media in any capacity you should not:

• Do anything that could be considered discriminatory against or bullying or harassing of any individual (this may also be enforced through the social media platforms’ own policies and guidelines).

• Post or share defamatory comments, content and images (i.e. anything that causes, or is likely to cause harm to a person’s reputation)

• Breach copyright laws by using images or content, e.g. module materials, TMA questions or answers, forum posts or anything provided by a tutor, without permission or failing to give due credit where permission has been granted. Social media networks will also have their own policies around this, which you must adhere to.

• Share confidential information relating to The Open University or any individual or organisation.

If your social media profile references the fact that you are student of The Open University, it is understood that the views you express are your own and do not reflect those of The Open University. This does not need to be explicitly stated in your social media profile.

You should familiarise yourself with, and adhere to, policies and codes of conduct for the social media platforms you use.

Please be aware that posting offensive comments on a public site can damage your reputation. These may be seen by potential contacts and employers and could call your judgement and character into question.
Your responsibilities in unofficial Open University-related social media groups

We recognise that students often set up social media groups specifically to discuss their current module or other matters connected to their studies. These are classed as ‘unofficial’ groups and, as such, are not the responsibility of, nor monitored by, The Open University, even if staff members opt to join those groups.

Please note that in addition to the guiding principles set out in section 3:

- The group administrators are responsible for monitoring and managing the behaviour in ‘unofficial’ groups. It is the administrators’ responsibility to highlight the purpose of the group, any criteria for membership and general rules of conduct.

- Any issues experienced in unofficial groups should be reported to the group administrator(s). A template for community guidelines for student group administrators is available.

- Any content posted in an open or closed unofficial group could be shared publicly or reported to The Open University.

- You must adhere to The Open University’s Plagiarism Policy (see Section 7 below). You are welcome to discuss module content on social media and help each other with understanding concepts. However, marked assignments of any kind must always be your unaided work, and explicit discussion of answers to assignments is forbidden. If there is any doubt, group administrators should exercise caution by closing down any such discussion.

- Information on social media channels may not be reliable or accurate. If you are unsure about something relating to your studies or The Open University in general, contact your tutor or Student Support Team.

- Open University staff may be members of unofficial student groups, either in their capacity as tutors, or as students themselves.

Reporting behaviour on social media

This policy is designed to ensure all students enjoy the use of social media and to help us to resolve problems and difficulties which may arise as quickly and easily as possible. If you have a complaint about the behaviour of another student, you should follow the procedure described in the Dignity and Respect Policy, specifically Section 1.5 and Appendix 2.
**Misuse of social media**

If you are found to have breached any aspect of this policy, for example if you discriminate or demonstrate bullying behaviour towards another student, or if you post copyrighted material, you may be subject to disciplinary action as set out in the [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#). If you wish to report unacceptable behaviour by another student you should follow the [Dignity and Respect policy](#) or the [Student Complaints and Appeals Procedures](#) in the first instance.

The Open University has the right to request removal of content from an official, managed social media account or from a personal social media account if it is deemed to be counter to this or other Open University policies and guidelines.
Glossary

‘Student’
for the purpose of this policy means people studying on a short course, a module, a Microcredential or qualification, a research degree student or in other situations, for example if you have completed your studies but are still active in the Open University community as an alumnus or ‘buddy’.

Public social media
pages and areas on social media that can be accessed by anyone.

Closed / private social media
pages and areas on social media where access is restricted to members or those given permission to view and participate.

Official social media accounts
The Open University’s corporate social media accounts that are managed by Open University staff and represent the institution’s work and views.

Other Open University social media accounts
these are social media accounts that are operated by individuals or teams of staff and/or students of The Open University, which may be open access or may be private.

Twibbons
a twibbon overlays an image onto your social media profile to indicate your support for a cause or an organisation.