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## Alternative format of the Social Media Policy

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact us via <http://www.open.ac.uk/contact/> (phone +44 (0)300 303 5303).

## Summary of policy

This policy explains our expectations when Students and Learners use social media as part of their studies or when setting up study- or Open University-related social media sites, accounts or groups. It also explains how you should discuss your experiences relating to your study and support with other students, staff, and others connected to the Open University.

The policy additionally covers reporting of behaviour that may be in breach of this policy.

## Scope

### Who and what this policy covers

This policy applies to you if you are an Open University student or learner, including those studying Microcredentials, as well as postgraduate research students.

Throughout this policy, “we/us/our” refers to The Open University, and “you/your” refers to any Student who falls under the scope of the policy.

This policy covers behaviour on all social media platforms where you are interacting with other Students, prospective Students, Learners or staff or are discussing The Open University.

‘Social media’ is any interactive online facility that allows the creation and sharing of content including ideas, opinions and discussions. It can include:

- social networking websites such as Facebook and professional networking sites such as LinkedIn.
- video and photo sharing websites such as Flickr, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube.
- messaging services such as WhatsApp, Signal, Facebook Messenger and Snapchat. Note that many messaging services are not monitored and may be encrypted, it is possible that anyone receiving a message may post the contents of any exchange publicly.
- micro-blogging sites such as Threads and X (formerly Twitter).

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- forums, discussion boards, as well as comment spaces on information-based websites, e.g., those provided online by newspapers and broadcasters and Reddit.
- online wikis that allow collaborative information sharing such as Wikipedia.

This Policy may be updated throughout the year to correct errors, improve clarity or accessibility, or to reflect changes in legal or regulatory requirements.

### **What this policy does not cover**

- Your personal social media profile, comments and any groups you manage where no reference is made to your study, your relationship with us or any individual or group of students, employees, partners and suppliers. However, you will still be subject to the terms and conditions of the social media platform concerned
- Open University Staff, for whom there is a [separate Social Media Policy](#).
- Open University provided resources that offer social media or ‘user to user’ facilities such as Tutor Group and module forums, and Adobe Connect as part of their studies are covered within the Non-Academic Offences section of the [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#).

### **The Open University Student Charter Values**

The [Student Charter](#) was developed in partnership by The Open University and the OU Students Association. It is a declaration of our shared values and the commitments we make to each other. This document has been developed with the Student Charter values as its foundation.

## **Introduction**

This policy is for students and learners and relates to any aspect of online behaviour that is in any way linked to The Open University or the Open University community including, for example, in a private group connected to your study, referring to The Open University or the Open University community or responding to one of the University’s official accounts.

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We expect all students and learners using social media for study to uphold the values in the [Student Charter](#), in particular interactions in which you:

- Treat others with courtesy and respect as you would when you meet people face to face. If you don't agree with someone's viewpoint, disagree politely and rationally, never make disagreements personal.
- Value diversity: learning from others with different backgrounds and perspectives is an important part of study.
- Act ethically and transparently.
- Support the mental health and wellbeing of yourself and others.

You should always work within the terms and conditions of the social media platforms you use.

The [Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom](#) sets out our commitments to academic freedom and free speech, and the conduct we expect from members of our community to ensure everyone is able to exercise these freedoms to the fullest possible extent. Whilst freedom of expression and academic freedom are protected by law, that protection is not absolute. The expression of views can be robust, whilst still being protected, including on social media. However, conduct that targets individuals could be viewed as unlawful harassment, and speech which defames another individual is unlawful.

This policy does not prevent you from using social media to talk about your experiences or to express critical views appropriately. However, you should ensure your social media activity is not defamatory, untrue or undermine professional credibility or integrity, the safety of our students, employees, partners or suppliers.

Defamatory or untrue statements made about other people and organisations unrelated to The Open University are likely to be covered by the terms and conditions of the social media platform concerned.

## Policy

### 1 Purpose

- 1.1. This policy sets out the principles to be followed when using social media to communicate with or discuss us, our staff or other students.
- 1.2. It covers:

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- how you should treat others
- what material should not be posted on social media sites
- keeping yourself safe while using social media
- the use of the Open University and Open University Students Association name, logo and related insignia
- your responsibility in online private groups
- how to report behaviour that breaches this policy and how we will respond to breaches

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## 2 General Principles

2.1 All our regulations and policies apply when you use social media in relation to your studies or reference to the Open University. In particular the [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#), the [Dignity and Respect, the Fitness to Study and the Student Computing policies](#). When online you should treat others with respect, in line with the Student Charter and advice given in [the computing guide](#), which you will have access to once you have registered with us. This means that the following activities are not acceptable:

- [Cyberbullying](#)
- [Trolling](#)
- [Harassment and Sexual Harassment](#)
- [Hate speech](#)
- Sexual misconduct
- [Collusion](#) or cheating when preparing assignments. This includes reposting or sharing materials provided as part of your study as well as completed assignments. For more information, please see our [Academic Conduct Policy](#)
- Posting or re-posting abuse of individuals or organisations, Posting or re-posting offensive or defamatory images or language or other [discriminatory material](#)
- Posting or re-posting anything that may bring us into disrepute or threatens the safety of staff (including former staff) and students or anyone connected with us

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- Any other behaviour that may harm others or is illegal
- 2.2 This policy applies to any aspect of online behaviour that is related to us, your study with us or [the Open University community](#), or anyone associated with us. This includes public and private groups from any personal social media account, or one of our official or informal accounts administered by us.
- 2.3 If you behave in a way that contravenes this policy, you will be subject to the [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#) which also specifies sanctions.
- 2.4 This policy is not intended to prevent you from using social media to discuss aspects of your studies that may concern you and you are free to discuss your experiences or to express critical views about us or your study; however we will not necessarily be able to address any points you raise in this way. You should contact your tutor in the first instance and then via your Student Support Team (see [‘Contact us’](#) below). If this does not resolve your concerns, you should use our [Complaints Procedure](#).
- If you are subjected to or witness behaviour on social media which is contrary to this policy, see [section 7.5](#) for how to report it. If you have any immediate concerns about someone’s safety, use 999 to inform the police. See also the section on [Safe Space Reporting](#).
- 2.5 If you are unsure about something relating to your studies or the Open University in general, you should contact your tutor or, if this doesn’t resolve the issue, the team that supports you via the [‘Contact us’](#) section below. Alternatively, you may wish to check with our [student policies and regulations site](#), or the [Help Centre](#) as Information posted on social media platforms may be inaccurate, fabricated, exaggerated, or not be from who it appears to be.
- 2.6 Participation or otherwise in social media is your choice. Do not feel obliged to communicate with anyone via social media, and similarly, do not pressurise other students or staff to communicate with you on social media.
- 2.7 You must familiarise yourself with, and adhere to, the terms and conditions, policies and codes of conduct for the social media platforms you use in relation to your studies or when discussing us.
- 2.8 If you have restricted online access to our forums and community tools, for example if you are studying in a secure institution, you are expected to respect this in social media and not join any formal or informal Open University Social media groups.

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See our [Students subject to legal licence, restriction, condition or orders policy](#) for more details.

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### 3 Posting on social media platforms

- 3.1 When posting on social media sites you should not say anything that you wouldn't say in person, or anything that you would be unhappy being said to you. If you join a social media site or service, you will be responsible for managing your behaviour. In cases where you join a study or Open University related group within a social media site or service, the group may be administered and moderated by a third party who will be responsible for setting the group rules (see also section 6.4 below), which do not override this Social Media policy.
- 3.2 Forums on third party social media platforms that are hosted or moderated by us are a place for free and open academic discussion (within the bounds of the [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#)) in a secure site. Posts or opinions from any of our forums or study related websites must not be shared outside the university in a way that identifies either a named or identifiable individual or a link with The Open University. Reposting, sharing or liking social media posts could reasonably be interpreted as endorsing a post. See also our [Academic Freedom Principles Statement](#).
- 3.3 You must not comment about anyone not involved in the discussion or who has left the platform. In particular:
- do not post critical remarks about others
  - do not criticise anyone for their connection to The Open University
- 3.4 Our study materials are copyright and may not be shared beyond the terms of 'fair dealing' allowed in the [Copyright, Patents and Designs Act 1988 Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988](#). No material provided as part of your study should be reposted or shared.
- 3.5 Recordings or extracts of recordings of online tutorials must not be shared on social media, whether these are official or those you have recorded yourself.
- 3.6 Answers to assessment questions and feedback must not be shared on social media; this would be contrary to our [Academic Conduct Policy](#).
- 3.7 Data protection, privacy and copyright legislation must be observed:

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- Do not share material created by anyone else, unless lawful permission to share is obtained, in which case, you must acknowledge the ownership and origin when sharing. Do not share personal information without the explicit consent of the person concerned.
- Do not share confidential information relating to us or connected organisations, including research results, financial information not in the public domain or information about litigation or possible litigation involving us or any third party.

For more information see section 8.1 of the [Student Computing Policy](#).

3.8 For more information about online safety, see section 7 of our [Student Computing Policy](#), the '[Safe Computing](#)' section of the Open University Computing Guide and [the 'Safe and secure computing'](#) section of the Help Centre.

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## 4 **Discussing your relationship with The Open University.**

- 4.1 When communicating on social media you should be clear you're expressing your own views, and not the views of the Open University.
- 4.2 Our logo, shield and crest may only be used on official, Open University-owned and -managed social media accounts. It should not be used in any other groups or accounts. Any requests to use the logo on social media should be sent to the Marketing and Communications Unit, email: [social-media@open.ac.uk](mailto:social-media@open.ac.uk). An exception may be made where the logo appears as an incidental component of a photograph of an Open University event or where an Open University building is in the background.
- 4.3 The Open University Students Association's name and logo may only be used on social media accounts and groups owned, managed or approved by the Students Association.

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## 5 **Joining and using a social media site**

- 5.1 You are responsible for checking the privacy policies of any Social Media platform you join as well as changing the settings to ensure your security.
- 5.2 In cases where you join a study or Open University related group within a social media site or service, the group may be administered and moderated by a third party who will be responsible for setting the group rules (see also section 5.4 below). These should not override this Social Media policy. If you are concerned about the behaviour of other members in a group, see section 6, 'Monitoring and reporting behaviour on social media' below.
- 5.3 You should not use social media to [collude](#) with others by discussing or sharing answers to any assessment task; you must adhere to The Open University's [Academic Conduct Policy](#). If you see anything that looks like collusion, you should report it as set out in section 6 below.
- 5.4 If you set up or take over a study or Open University related social media group, you should establish clear community guidelines which should consider the diversity of our students and that some may be under 18.
- 5.5 Those who run a study or Open University related social media site or group must create guidelines for the group that don't conflict with this policy. You should

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exclude members who do not adhere to the guidelines of the group or breach this, or any other, of our policies or regulations. Anyone who does so, should be reported using the procedure set out in section 6 below.

- 5.6 If you suspect that there has been any breach under the Data Protection Act where your, or someone else's, personal details have been revealed, you should report this to the social media provider concerned. This includes any breach you made have made accidentally.

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## 6 Monitoring and reporting behaviour on social media

- 6.1 If you breach this policy, we may act in accordance with other appropriate Open University policies, including:

- [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#)
- [Dignity and Respect Policy](#)
- [Fitness to Study](#)
- [Academic Conduct Policy](#)
- [Student Computing Policy](#)

- 6.2 If we do act against you, you will be told what this will be. Any action we do take is to ensure that you and others are kept safe online.

- 6.3 We actively manage official social media accounts representing the work and views of The Open University. These include the main corporate 'The Open University' accounts on X (formerly Twitter) (@OpenUniversity), Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/theopenuniversity/>), Instagram (theopenuniversity) as well as LinkedIn, TikTok, YouTube and Threads. In addition there are social media groups run by our faculties, nations and others. These accounts are monitored by staff, and any student posts, comments and questions are identified, assessed and responded quickly. Note that although moderated by our staff, the site or service may also be monitoring usage to ensure adherence to their own terms and conditions.

- 6.4 You should avoid using the Open University's name in such a way that brings us into disrepute. You are free to express your views, provided this is explicitly done in your own name and does not constitute unlawful harassment or speech which defames another individual. Any references or associations you make that could

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harm the Open University, or the Open University community may mean that we request that the provider removes comments or that user accounts are reported.

Posts that could cause harm to us include:

- confidential information relating to us and related organisations, such as research results, financial information not in the public domain.
- anything that may bring The Open University into disrepute, such as repeating unsubstantiated rumours or gossip, unfounded accusations against staff or other students or personal abuse.
- personal information related to staff or students shared without the explicit consent of those concerned.

6.5 If you are subjected to or witness behaviour on study or Open University related social media pages that is contrary to this policy, please report it using the [Reporting Behaviour form](#).

6.6 All reports will be followed up and action taken where necessary. Section 2.3 outlines penalties that may apply if upheld. Posts we suspect may have broken the law will be reported to the police.

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## Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at The Open University

Policies are inclusive of all Open University Students, Learners, Enquirers and Alumni, regardless of age, civil status, dependency or caring status, care experience, disability, family status, gender, gender identity, gender reassignment, marital status, marriage and civil partnerships, membership of the Traveller community, political opinion, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, socio-economic background, sex, sexual orientation or trades union membership status.

### Safe Space Reporting

The University is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment in which everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity and respect. Unlawful discrimination of any kind across our University will not be tolerated. Safe Space Reporting is available through [an online tool](#) through which staff, students, learners and visitors are encouraged to report incidents of assault, bullying, harassment, hate crime, or sexual harassment. It also provides information about what you can do if these incidents happen to you, or to someone you know, and where you can find support.

## Glossary

### Collusion

Knowingly making any of your academic work available or offering it to another person for presentation as if it were their own, presenting the work of another person as your own for assessment, or working with others to complete an assignment which is meant to be completed and assessed individually.

### Cyberbullying

The deliberate, repeated, and hostile use of online services and technologies to harm or harass others. It includes:

- maliciously spreading rumours, lies or gossip
- intimidating or aggressive behaviour
- offensive or threatening comments or content
- posting private images of an individual without consent (including, private sexual images of an individual)

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- sharing unwanted images (including sexual images)
- posting material deliberately mocking an individual with the intent to harass or humiliate them
- sending messages or posting comments with the intent to trick, force or pressure the receiver into doing something that they would not otherwise be comfortable doing (grooming).

### **Discriminatory material**

Content that contains unjustified statements that discriminate against one or more groups of people.

### **Harassment**

Behaviour that makes someone feel distressed, humiliated or threatened For more details, see the definition in section 1.3 of our [Dignity and Respect policy](#)

### **Hate speech**

The offence of incitement to hatred, which occurs when someone acts in a way that is threatening and intended to stir up hatred. That could be in words, pictures, videos, music. Hate content may include messages calling for violence against a specific person or group, web pages that show pictures, videos or descriptions of violence against anyone due to their perceived differences, chat forums where people ask other people to commit hate crimes against a specific person or group.

### **Open University community**

This is normally considered to include applicants, current students, learners, apprentices, past students, alumni, honorary graduates, staff (past and present), donors and partners.

### **Open University managed account**

The official social media accounts that we administer and moderate on third party social media platforms by The Open University to support students and provide news and information about the University.

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## Social media/social media platforms

Websites and online services, including mobile applications, that provide 'user-to-user' services. This is where content is generated directly by users of the service which may be seen by other users of the service. In addition to platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram and so on, it also includes discussion forums, blogs and "wiki" pages, including Wikipedia.

## Trolling

Making deliberately offensive or provocative posts with the aim of upsetting someone or eliciting an angry response. Trolling behaviour may also include stalking a victim's posts in order to respond in an offensive or provocative manner.

## Related Documentation

Refer to the following documentation in conjunction with this document:

- [Student Computing Policy](#)
- [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#)
- [Academic Freedom Principles Statement](#)
- [Dignity and Respect Policy](#)
- [Fitness to Study Policy](#)
- [Academic Conduct Policy](#)
- [Prevent Principles](#)
- [Recording of Online Tutorials](#)
- [Safeguarding Policy](#)
- [Open University Students Association Social Media Policy](#)

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## Contact us

Please use the [contacts page](#) to contact your Student Support Team or Apprenticeship Enrolment and Support Team. Research degree students should contact the Research Degrees Office at [research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk](mailto:research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk)

Microcredential students studying via FutureLearn should contact [mc.support@futurelearn.com](mailto:mc.support@futurelearn.com)

If you are studying a Microcredential via The Open University's Virtual Learning Environment should contact your [Student Support Team](#). Those studying Vocational Qualifications should contact the Vocational Qualification Centre [vq-enquiries@open.ac.uk](mailto:vq-enquiries@open.ac.uk)

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## Feedback

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please submit these to [SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk](mailto:SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk)

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## Summary of significant changes since last version

There are a number of changes from the previous version of this policy. In summary the document

- The policy title has changed from Social Media Policy to Student Social Media Policy to reflect the intended audience.
- The policy has been rewritten to improve clarity.
- Links and other references have been updated.
- Material that covered advice and guidance has been removed and replaced with links to the Help Centre or the Computing Guide to avoid repetition.

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## Policies superseded by this document

This document replaces the previous version of the Using Social Media Policy v2.0 dated January 2021.

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