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Alternative Format

If you require this Student Social Media Policy in an alternative format please [Contact Us](#), telephone us on +44 (0)300 303 5303, or get in touch with your Student Support Team via StudentHome if you are a current Open University student. If you are studying an apprenticeship please contact the Apprentice Enrolment and Support Team (AEST) by email on apprentice-support@open.ac.uk, or telephone (+44 (0) 300 303 4121). Welsh-speaking Students and Learners are welcome to speak with a student support adviser in Welsh on +44 (0) 29 2047 1170. Research Degree Students can contact the Research Degrees Office via email research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk.

Introduction

This policy is for students and learners and covers any aspect of online behaviour that is linked to The Open University or the [Open University community](#) including, for example, in a private group connected to your study, referring to us, or the wider the Open University community (even if the group name doesn't explicitly mention "The Open University") or responding to one of our official accounts.

We expect all students and learners using social media for study to:

- Treat others with courtesy and respect as you would when you meet people in person. 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 [Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech and 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 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 undermines the professional credibility or integrity, or 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.

Scope

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. The term 'student' in this policy includes all of these groups.

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 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 while 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).
- forums and discussion boards as well as comment spaces on information-based websites, e.g., those provided online by newspapers and broadcasters or 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 or belong to 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](#) and the [Student Computing Policy](#)

Support and Information

How to contact us

If you have any queries around the content provided within this document and how to interpret it, please [Contact Us](#). To check the contact details for the Open University, please see [OU Offices](#). If you are studying an apprenticeship, please contact the Apprentice Enrolment and Support Team (AEST) by email on apprentice-support@open.ac.uk, or telephone (+44 (0) 300 303 4121). Welsh-speaking Students and Learners may speak with a student support adviser in Welsh on +44 (0) 29 2047 1170. Research Degree Students can contact the Research Degrees Office via email research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk.

Reporting Bullying and Harassment

The Open University is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment where everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity and respect. Unlawful discrimination of any kind across The Open University will not be tolerated. We encourage staff, students, learners and visitors to report incidents of assault, bullying, harassment, microaggressions, hate crime or sexual harassment through [Report + Support](#). This platform also provides information about what you can do if you or someone you know experiences such incidents, and where you can find support.

Policy

1. Policy 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:
 - 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

2. Policy 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](#) 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 and 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), students or anyone connected with us
- 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, [the Open University community](#), or anyone associated with us. This includes public and private groups from any personal social media account, or 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 instead 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 6.5](#) 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 above on [Reporting Bullying and Harassment](#).

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

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 or about 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 [Code of Practice for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom](#).

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:

- 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.

4. Discussing your relationship with The Open University.

4.1 When communicating on social media you should make it clear that you are 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. 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 [Open SU's](#) name and logo may only be used on social media accounts and groups owned, managed or approved by Open SU.

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 consider creating guidelines for the group that don't conflict with this policy. You should consider excluding members who do not adhere to the guidelines of the group or breach this, or any other, of our policies or regulations. Anyone whose behaviour you think merits it, 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.

5.7 You are responsible for any social media accounts you create. If an account is hacked or misused in your name in a way that breaches this policy, it is your responsibility to report it (see section 6, below). If you do not, disciplinary action may be taken if the account is used for inappropriate behaviour unless you can provide evidence that you were not involved.

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 action we will take. 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. Our staff monitor these accounts, and any student posts, comments and questions are identified, assessed and responded to 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 harm us, 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 and financial information not in the public domain.
- anything that may bring us 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.

Definitions

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)
- 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. This could be in words, pictures, videos, or 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 us to support students and provide news and information about the University.

Social media/social media platforms

Websites and online services, including mobile applications, which 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 Policies and Legislation

Refer to the following documentation in conjunction with this document:

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

Give Us Your Feedback

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please share this with us, by emailing SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk.

Our Student Charter Values

[The Student Charter](#) was developed jointly by The Open University and Open SU. 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.

Our commitment to Equality Diversity and Inclusion

Our commitment to equality and inclusion is embedded in all that we do and reflects our mission to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. We celebrate diversity and the strengths that it brings, whilst challenging under-representation and differences in outcomes within our institution. We promote and manage equality and diversity to meet both our strategic goals and our statutory equality duties. We achieve this in many ways, including the development of inclusive policy.

Welsh language standards

[Safonau'r Gymraeg \(Welsh Language Standards\)](#)

The Open University is one of several universities named in the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. This means that any students in Wales can expect to receive certain services from the OU in Welsh. These are outlined in what's called the [OU's Welsh language standards](#).

This means that you can speak to our student recruitment and support team in Welsh or contact the university in Welsh. You can find out more about your rights as a Welsh language user on the [OU in Wales website](#).

About this Document

Summary of Significant Changes since last version

The following changes have been made

- The policy has been reformatted to use the latest policy template
- Links and internal references have been updated where necessary
- Changes in the text to improve clarity

Policies Superseded by this Document

This document replaces the previous version of the Using Social Media Policy v3.0 dated August 2024.

Document Information

Version number 4.0

Approved by: Delegate of the Director, Academic Services

Effective from: July 2025

Date for review: May 2026

Charity Statement

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England and Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302).

The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in relation to its secondary activity of credit broking.