Social Media Policy

Contents

Version number: 2.0	Approved by:
Effective from: 1 January 2021	Date for review: March 2023

In an emergency

If you are concerned that a child, young person, or vulnerable adult is in possible IMMEDIATE danger - including risk of suicide, please contact the Emergency Services by telephoning 999 or 112 from outside the UK.

If the individual is under 18 you must then email details about the incident to Safeguarding-Referrals@open.ac.uk. If you cannot send an email, call Tel +44(0) 1908 858284, and leave a message and the Safeguarding Referrals Team will contact you during standard business hours.

Summary of policy

This policy provides information and guidance on the use of social media by Open University students when it is associated in any way with their relationship with the University. The policy covers posting to social media sites, keeping safe online and running a social media site in connection with studies (e.g. any group formed and led by Open University students which relates to their connection to the University).

The document also includes information about how to report behaviour which may be in breach of this policy.

The Social Media Policy and other associated guidelines are designed to help you communicate safely and responsibly online.

Summary of significant changes since last version

There are a number of significant changes from the previous version of this policy (Version 1.0). In summary the document has been restructured to emphasise:

- Staying safe online (section 3 and paragraph 5.1)

- Applicability of Open University regulations and policies to the online space (paragraphs 1.1 and 6.1)

The process for reporting behaviour contrary to this policy has been added.

Policies superseded by this document

This document replaces the previous version of the Using Social Media Policy v1.0 dated March 2020.

Scope

What this policy covers

This policy applies to you if you use social media in relation to your Open University studies or as a member of the Open University, including the Open University's official and unofficial channels, and public or closed / private social media networks.

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, or your apprenticeship programme throughout your time as an Open University student, including any time spent on approved study breaks or between modules.

This policy relates to behaviour on all forms of social media where you are interacting with Open University students or staff or are referring to The Open University. Examples of social media include (but are not limited to):

- social networking websites such as Facebook and Discord

- video and photo sharing websites such as Flickr, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube

- messaging sites such as WhatsApp, Messenger and SnapChat

- micro-blogging sites such as Twitter

- networking sites whether personal or professional such as LinkedIn

- forums and comment spaces on information-based websites, e.g. BBC Have Your Say

- weblogs, including corporate and personal blogs

- forums and discussion boards such as Yahoo! Groups or Google Groups

- online wikis that allow collaborative information sharing such as Wikipedia.

This list is not exhaustive; the policy covers all social media platforms whether listed here or not.

What this policy does not cover

- Staff posting to social media sites in their capacity as staff – a Staff Social Media Policy is in place which all staff are expected to adhere to when using social media in connection with their work.

- Students' use of resources such as Tutor Group Forums, Module Forums and Adobe Connect as part of their studies which is covered by paragraph SD 1.3 of the [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#).

Related Documentation

Refer to the following documentation in conjunction with this document:

- [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](#)

The Open University Student Charter Values

This policy specifically aligns with the following Open University Student Charter values:

1. We treat each other with courtesy and respect, respecting the rights of individuals to hold different beliefs and views and to express them appropriately.

2. We value diversity and challenge inequalities and we are stronger for doing so.

4. We communicate with each other in ways which are clear, relevant, accurate and timely.

7. We act ethically and transparently, providing and making use of fair and open means to deal with our concerns and grievances, learning from them.

8. We challenge bullying and harassment and are committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of all members of our University community.

11. We work to maintain and enhance the standards and reputation of our University recognising the contributions that all members make to its success.

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.

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Introduction

Social media provides a useful way of connecting with others and has many benefits. The Open University uses various social media platforms to celebrate and promote the achievements of students and staff. Students also use social media to celebrate their hard work and connection with the University, and to connect with other students both via public forums and in private groups.

Social media offers opportunities for developing a sense of connection and most people use it appropriately, finding benefit from it. However, it can come with risks. Unfortunately, some people take advantage of the distancing nature of the online space to behave in a way which would not be acceptable in a face-to-face encounter. This policy aims to ensure that students use social media appropriately and makes clear what is not acceptable online.

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

The policy seeks to promote behaviour on social media which upholds the values in the Student Charter, in particular interactions in which students:

- Treat others with courtesy and respect

- Value diversity

- Act ethically and transparently

- Support the mental health and wellbeing of themselves and others.

The principles of freedom of expression and academic freedom apply to the use of social media; however, you should ensure that your use is responsible, within the terms and conditions of the platform you are using and doesn't break any UK laws (and any law in the country in which you are based if not the UK). You should ensure that you are aware of and follow any codes of conduct and other policies of the social media platforms you use.

A student's personal social media profile and comments are unlikely to be of interest to the University where no direct or indirect reference is made to it, any individual or groups of students, employees, partners and suppliers. However, the University may be concerned where the nature of a communication is regarded as being defamatory or misleading, where it undermines professional credibility or integrity or safety of students, employees, partners and suppliers or potentially damages the reputation of the University.

Policy

1   Purpose

1.1.   This policy sets out the principles to be followed when using social media to connect with The Open University, staff or students.

1.2   It covers:

- the expectation that you will treat others with respect.

- the sort of material and information that should not be posted on social media sites

- keeping yourself safe online

- the use of official Open University and Open University Students Association name, logo and crest

- your responsibility to manage your own behaviour online in private groups

- how to report behaviour that breaches this policy

- how The Open University will handle breaches of the policy.

2   General Principles

2.1   When using social media, you must remember that Open University regulations and policies apply to behaviour online in the same way as they would in a physical space. Of particular relevance are the Code of Practice for Student Discipline, and the Dignity and Respect and Fitness to Study Policies. Whether online or face-to-face you should treat people with respect and expect others to do the same. Types of unacceptable behaviour include (but are not limited to):

- Cyberbullying

- Trolling

- Harassment

- Hate speech

- Collusion or cheating on assignments

- Posting or re-posting abuse

- Posting or re-posting offensive or defamatory images or using offensive or defamatory language

- Posting or re-posting discriminatory material

- Posting or re-posting anything that may bring The Open University into disrepute or threaten the safety of staff (including former staff) and students or anyone connected with the university.

2.2   This policy applies to any aspect of online behaviour that is in any way linked to The Open University (for example, in a private group connected to your study, making reference to the Open University or your study in any personal social media account, or responding to one of the Open University official accounts).

2.3   Students behaving in a way that contravenes this policy will be dealt with under the Code of Practice for Student Discipline. Sanctions range from an informal caution which may need to be disclosed in any fitness to practice disclosure request, through the withholding of marks or qualification up to expulsion or exclusion from the University for serious or repeated offences.

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2.4   This policy is not intended to prevent you from using social media to talk about your experiences or to express critical views appropriately. You should not, however, assume that points raised on social media will be addressed by The Open University. You should therefore consider whether your concerns would be better dealt with through the Complaints Procedure.

2.5   The information posted 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, consult official sources of information such as student policies, the HelpCentre, your module forum, tutor (or Apprenticeship Programme Delivery Manager (APDM)) or Student Support Team.

2.6   There is no compulsion for any Open University student, or any Open University staff member, to engage on social media. Do not feel obliged to engage or connect with any other individual (whoever they are) in that way. Similarly, do not push or pressurise other students, or Open University staff members, to engage or connect with you on social media.

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

2.8   You should also 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.

3   Posting to social media sites

3.1   When posting to social media sites you must be aware that there is a person behind each account, don't say anything online that you wouldn't say in person, or anything that you would be unhappy being said to you.

3.2   Open University hosted forums exist as 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 a forum 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.

3.3   You must not comment about a named individual – whether a fellow student or a tutor not involved in the conversation – who may be part of a social media group or could see a re-posted comment. In particular:

- do not post critical remarks about other students, tutors or other members of Open University staff

- do not criticise anyone for their connection to The Open University.

3.4   Module materials including assessment questions, or anything provided by a tutor must not be shared without permission and where permission is given, you must credit the source.

3.5   Recordings or extracts of recordings of online tutorials must not be shared on social media.

3.6   Answers to assessment questions and feedback must not be shared on social media under any circumstances – this could be contrary to the Academic Conduct Policy.

3.7   Data protection, privacy and copyright legislation must be observed. Do not share material belonging to or created by anyone without due acknowledgement of ownership or origin.

- Do not share personal information without the explicit consent of the person concerned

- Do not share confidential information relating to The Open University or other organisations such as research results, any financial information not in the public domain or information about litigation or possible litigation involving The Open University.

4 Keeping yourself safe online

4.1 You should be aware of the risks online. In particular you should guard yourself against anyone stealing your identity and oversharing either your personal information or your views.

- Check your privacy settings and consider how much you are sharing

- Be very cautious about sharing personal information (such as date or place of birth) that could be used to steal your identity – ensure you know who you are sharing such things with

- Never share your log in information or passwords.

4.2 Remember that anything you post can live on in the cyber world, even if you delete it, so don't post something you wouldn't want to be associated with in a year, two years or even 20 years time.

4.3 It is possible that prospective employers could do a social media search for you, so don't post or repost anything that could call into question your fitness to practice or your professionalism. The types of posts you 'like' and the groups or organisations you follow could also cause your judgement to be questioned in future.

5 Demonstrating your connection to The Open University

5.1 Whilst we are happy to connect with and celebrate our students on social media you must be careful to ensure you do not appear to be speaking on behalf the Open University. If there is any ambiguity, then say explicitly that your views are your own.

5.2 The Open University's name, logo and crest may only be used on official, Open University-owned and managed social media accounts. They must 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 from any Open University Twibbons which can be used to demonstrate your association with The Open University.

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5.3   The Open University Students Association's name and logo may only be used on its official owned and managed social media accounts and groups. They must not be used in any other groups or accounts. Any requests to use the logo on social media should be sent to ousa@open.ac.uk.

6   Joining and using a social media site

6.1   When you join a social media site or group, be aware what information you are sharing with other members (for example, joining a WhatsApp group entails sharing your mobile phone number). This could potentially be shared outside the group by other members. If you have any questions about what information will be visible to others, check with the social media site's policies and your settings before joining.

6.2   Unlike module forums, these private sites and groups are not moderated by The Open University, so members are responsible for managing their own behaviours. The group administrators and moderators are responsible for setting the group rules (see also section 6.4 below) which must not contradict this Social Media policy, in accordance with Open University policies. Unfortunately, some members may not behave appropriately at all times; the approach to take if you are concerned about online behaviour, is detailed in section 7 below.

6.3   Social media groups can be useful for discussing the general principles of your module but must not be used to collude with others by discussing or sharing answers to specific TMA questions or other assessments. You must adhere to The Open University's Academic Conduct Policy. If you are concerned about online behaviour which feels like collusion you should report it as set out below.

6.4   If you set up or administer a group, we would urge you to establish community guidelines that can be shared and understood by all. Sample community guidelines are available in our Social Media Toolkit.

6.5   Administrators of sites or groups must be prepared to exclude members who do not adhere to the guidelines or whose behaviour is in any way unacceptable. Behaviour which breaches Open University regulations or policies should be reported using the procedure set out below. Every member of a group has the responsibility to report unacceptable behaviour.

7 Monitoring and reporting behaviour on social media

7.1 If you use social media in ways that are contrary to the principles and spirit of this policy we reserve the right to take action in accordance with appropriate other university policies, specifically (but not exclusively):

- Code of Practice for Student Discipline

- Dignity and Respect Policy

- Fitness to Study

- Academic Conduct Policy

7.2 You will be advised of any additional action which may be taken to respond to your case. This is so we can ensure that you and other members of the Open University community are kept safe online.

7.3 The Open University has a number of actively managed official social media accounts representing the work and views of The Open University. These include, for example, the main corporate 'The Open University' accounts on Twitter (@OpenUniversity), Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/theopenuniversity/) and Instagram (theopenuniversity). These accounts are monitored by staff, and any student posts, comments and questions are identified, assessed and responded to in a timely fashion.

7.4 We also 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. Posts that could cause harm to The Open University include but are not limited to:

- confidential information relating to The Open University or other organisation such as research results, or any financial information not in the public domain

- information about litigation or possible litigation involving The Open University

- anything that may bring The Open University into disrepute

- personal information shared without the explicit consent of the person concerned.

7.5   If you are subjected to or witness behaviour on social media which is contrary to this policy you should use this web form (see also Appendix 1) to report the behaviour. Please provide information about the behaviour that has caused concern and screen shots of any posts.

7.6   Reports of concerns received will be progressed as appropriate according to the type of concern received. There are a range of penalties available under the relevant codes and policies up to and including expulsion from the University for the most serious offences. Posts found to have broken the law will be reported to the police.

Glossary of terms

Collusion

Collusion is where a student works too closely with one or more individuals to help solve and/or answer an assessed task or question, which results in the production of a joint answer or solution (whether intentionally or not) in an attempt to gain an unfair advantage over others in their assignments.

Cyberbullying

Means the use of the Internet and related technologies to harm or harass other people, in a deliberate, repeated, and hostile manner. Cyberbullying behaviour includes (but is not limited to):

- 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, but not limited to, private sexual images of an individual)

- sharing unwanted images (including sexual images)

- posting comments/photos etc. 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).

Harassment

Harassment is when someone behaves in a way which makes you feel distressed, humiliated or threatened.

Examples of harassment include:

- unwanted contact

- abuse and bullying online

- stalking

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Hate speech

Means public speech that expresses hate or encourages violence towards a person or group based on something such as race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation. Hate speech includes communications of animosity or disparagement of an individual or a group on account of a group characteristic such as race, colour, national origin, sex, disability, religion, or sexual orientation.

Litigation

Means legal action or the process of taking legal action.

Open University managed account

Means the official social media accounts that are actively managed and represent the work and views of The Open University. These include, for example, the main corporate 'The Open University' accounts on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. These accounts are monitored.

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.

Trolling

Means making a deliberately offensive or provocative online post 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.

Twibbon

Means an icon which can be pasted over your avatar or profile photo on a social networking site, indicating the support for a given cause, group, brand, etc.

Further clarification

If you have any queries around the content provided within this document and how to interpret it, please contact the appropriate student support team for your qualification:

Apprenticeships:

your Apprenticeship Programme Qualification Manager or Apprenticeship Enrolment Support Team

Vocational Qualification

the Vocational Qualification Centre - vq-enquiries@open.ac.uk

Research Degree

the Research Degrees Team in the Graduate School – research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk

Corporate and Professional Development Course,

Executive Education Team, cpd-support@open.ac.uk

Other Qualifications

Your Student Support Team – they can be contacted via the 'Contact Us' section on the Help Centre

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.

Alternative format of the Social Media Policy

If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact the Student Support Team via http://www.open.ac.uk/contact/ (phone +44 (0)300 303 5303), or your dedicated Student Support Team via StudentHome if you are an Open University student currently registered on a module. Postgraduate students should contact the Graduate School via research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk).