

# Policy on student use and misuse of social media

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UNIVERSITY OF  
**WINCHESTER**

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Summary:	Policy on student use and misuse of social media at the University of Winchester.

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## 1. About this policy

- 1.1. The University of Winchester ('the University') is committed to delivering a creative and engaging learning environment for its students. The University recognises the benefits and opportunities that social media can bring as well as the risks and hazards.
- 1.2. The aim of this policy is to encourage positive engagement with social media and to help minimise the risks to students and others at the University through the misuse of social media and to ensure that these channels are not being used to harass or harm others.
- 1.3. This policy should always be read alongside our Social Media Guidance for Students document. This guidance outlines important information and examples of when an employee or student might be considered to misuse social media.

## 2. Scope of this policy

- 2.1. This policy deals with the use of all forms of social media. 'Social media' is the term commonly used to refer to the channels used to interact with other people online. It allows us to connect with others; build new connections and communities; and share news, ideas and opinions in the form of text, images or videos. Whilst not exhaustive, social media platforms covered by this policy include Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, Wikipedia, Instagram, SnapChat, WhatsApp, YouTube and all other social networking sites, internet postings and blogs.
- 2.2. This policy applies to all students at the University and to any personal communications within a social media platform, whether privately or publically, regardless of location, including away from campus and on personal devices, whether to an individual directly, to a limited group or a public post, but only to the extent that they constitute unlawful behaviour, misuse or a breach of this policy. Please be aware that in a digital age, there remains a high risk of even personal and private messages being shared with third parties, or made public without consent. We therefore ask you to consider using a respectful and professional tone at all times, even for private and personal communications, especially when directly or indirectly referencing the university.
- 2.3. The University will safeguard the rights of our students to Freedom of Expression (EHRC/HRA: Article 10) and academic freedom of speech, provided it is within the law and compliant with contractual agreements and University policies. This includes raising valid and truthful issues regarding the University via social media.
- 2.4. This policy applies to students at the University of Winchester. A separate policy exists for members of staff at the University. It covers acceptable use of social media for staff and, in relation to students, states that:
  - a) The University and its employees will only use social media to impart course information in addition to, not in place of, the formal channels of Canvas and University email
  - b) Employees are not permitted to use social media to harass or bully students
- 2.5. Students are not required to be a user of any social media platforms nor to use social media for any aspect being a student at the University, their studies nor their interactions with University staff.

- 2.6. Nothing in this policy is intended to have the effect of limiting either freedom of speech or academic freedom, subject to that freedom being exercised within the law.
- 2.7. This policy may need to be amended to reflect the changing nature of social media and its use. Any changes will be agreed through the Student Academic Council, Senate and the Planning and Resources Committee.
- 2.8. This policy should be read alongside other University policies and guidelines, including:
  - a) Student Charter
  - b) ICT Acceptable Use Policy
  - c) Conduct Policy for Students
  - d) Disciplinary Procedures for Students
  - e) Complaints Policy
  - f) Relationships Policy and Procedure
  - g) Equality and Diversity Policy
  - h) Respect Policy
  - i) Harassment and bullying among students – Guidelines for Support
  - j) Gender Identity and Reassignment Policy
  - k) Policy for employee use of social media

### 3. University employees' use of social media to communicate with current or prospective students

- 3.1. A separate policy exists for employees about the appropriate, professional and academic use of social media. Students can access this via the University intranet.
- 3.2. Students are not required to be a user of any social media platforms nor to use social media for any aspect being a student at the University, their studies nor their interactions with University staff.
- 3.3. Canvas must be used to communicate course information to students. Social media may only be used to impart course information in addition to the formal channels of Canvas, University email and the University Intranet. Once a message or details have been posted on Canvas it can be shared using social media via University accounts. Personal social media accounts should not be used.
- 3.4. It is not normally appropriate for students and members of staff to be friends on social media sites; the professional relationship will always take precedence while the individual is a student at the University. Please refer to the University's Relationship Policy for further details about staff to student relationships.

### 4. Acceptable use of social media by students

- 4.1. As a student at the University you should ensure that your social media profiles and the content you post online do not breach the law or University policies.
- 4.2. Students are responsible for what they communicate on or through social media and must all adhere to the standards of behaviour set out in this policy and any related policies (see 2.7 above).

4.3. In all cases where a students' use of social media identifies their link with the University (for example for a society or club), their profile should make it clear that the views are those of the account holder and are not made on behalf of the University.

4.4. What you put online has the potential to be understood in a way that you did not intend and to reach a wider audience than you intended or expected - posts and media can be shared and posted elsewhere, it is outside the author's control and therefore cannot be deemed to be private. Therefore, you should be mindful of the potential impact and permanence of anything you post online:

- a) You should avoid posting anything that you would not wish to be in the public domain or that you would not be willing to say personally to the face of another individual.
- b) It will not be a defence to any disciplinary action under the University's policies, that a student only intended a post to be private.
- c) Be respectful to others when making any statement on social media and be aware that you are personally responsible for all communications which will be published online potentially for anyone to see (privacy settings are not a sufficient safeguard, anyone can copy and share what you have posted).

4.5. Students must not use social media in a way or post anything that:

- a) Could be considered to harass, bully or unlawfully discriminate either by direct communication towards staff, students or third parties, or by posting unlawful communications about staff, students or third parties (see the Harassment and bullying among students Guidelines)
- b) Is threatening, harassing, discriminatory, illegal, obscene, indecent, defamatory, or hostile towards any individual or entity
- c) Discriminates on the grounds of race, sex and gender identity, pregnancy, disability, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political or religious belief or contravenes the University's Equality and Diversity Policy
- d) Engages in any activity that constitutes a criminal offence
- e) Makes false or misleading statements as determined by an investigation under the University's Disciplinary procedures
- f) Impersonates University staff, students or third parties or uses fake accounts or another person's name without their consent
- g) Breaches copyright
- h) Divulges University confidential or commercially sensitive information or reveals personal information about a University member of staff, student, client or customer (data, contact details or photographs) without their permission on social media, whether during or after your time as a student with the University
- i) Includes details of complaints, disciplinary proceedings and/or legal proceedings/potential legal proceedings involving the University. Doing so may result in further investigation or disciplinary action which may result in termination of registration.
- j) Expresses opinions on the University's behalf via social media, unless expressly authorised to do so by the Director of Communications and Marketing or an identified representative (you may be required to undergo training in order to obtain such authorisation).

## 5. Bullying and harassment on social media

- 5.1. The University does not tolerate any form of bullying or harassment by or of members of University staff or students, whether online or in person.
- 5.2. The following examples illustrate the types of behaviour which the University considers to be forms of cyber bullying:
  - a) Maliciously spreading rumours, lies or gossip
  - b) Intimidating or aggressive behaviour
  - c) Offensive or threatening comments or content
  - d) Posting comments/photos etc. deliberately mocking an individual with the intent to harass or humiliate them
- 5.3. Cyber bullying and harassment may also take place via other means of electronic communication such as email, text or instant messaging. Private use of social media is not exempt from the rules applying to bullying and harassment any more than a private or personal conversation is. Unlawful use of social media, whether civil or criminal breaches, may result in disciplinary action.
- 5.4. Students and staff should be mindful of the University's policies and the law when connecting (for example, becoming Facebook 'friends') or communicating with others via social media. Students and staff should not enter into private dialogue on social media (for example, WhatsApp or Messenger) that could be described as harassment or bullying.

## 6. Breach of this policy

- 6.1. Any student who experiences bullying or harassment via social media, or in any other context, by another student or a member of staff will have the full support of the University.
- 6.2. If you have concerns about the misuse of social media that breaches this policy, or how you or fellow students or others are being treated online, please report this to an appropriate member of staff (for example personal tutor, Head of Department, Student Services, housing assistants) or the Student Union.
- 6.3. The University takes complaints and concerns from students very seriously. There are formal and appropriate ways for students to raise complaints via the Complaints Procedure as set out in the University Complaints Policy and the Student Disciplinary Procedure.
- 6.4. This policy will be invoked when the University is made aware of inappropriate use of social media or if these channels are being used to harass or harm others.
- 6.5. Breach of this policy may result in action under the Student Disciplinary Policy which can result in action up to and including expulsion from the University. Any student suspected of committing a breach of this policy will be required to co-operate with our investigation. In more serious cases, it may be necessary to involve the police. This may include being required to remove any social media content that we consider to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in disciplinary action.