

Social Media Policy

What is Social Media?

1. Social media is any online interactive tool which encourages participation, interaction and exchanges, such as blogs, discussion forums, instant messaging and any website that allows public commenting or posting. New forms of social media appear on a fairly regular basis; at the moment, popular platforms include Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Vine and Twitter.

Freedom of Speech & Academic Freedom

2. Freedom of speech and academic freedom are central tenets of university life, including in a social media context, and nothing in this guidance is intended to compromise these fundamental freedoms.

Online Etiquette

3. When using social media it can be tempting to speak and act in a way we wouldn't face-to-face. Remember that innocently intended comments posted online may be misconstrued, as the written word can lack the nuances of face-to-face interaction. Tips to bear in mind:
 - What style should you be using? Always be courteous, even when you don't feel like it. Remember that in most cases, content you post will be public, it may not be possible to remove it at a later date and it could be reposted or shared through other forms of social media.
 - Think twice about how you post content if you're feeling angry or emotional about something and consider the effect that this might have on the situation. If you're responding to someone else's post ask yourself whether you are sure that you have read the post in the way in which it was intended. Your response could just make things more heated. If responding to a friend, consider if you could talk about things instead of escalating on social media.

The Code of Discipline

Consequences of posting inappropriate material

4. Using social media to post offensive comments, images or other content may be a breach of University and/or College rules and could result in disciplinary action by the Proctors or Dean.
5. Such material could constitute:
 - A. “harassment” under the College’s Harassment Policy or
 - B. a breach of section 3.9a of the College’s regulations which state that ‘Violent, indecent, disorderly, threatening, or offensive behaviour or language is forbidden in all places and at all times’

Professional Courses

6. If you are taking a course which will result in a professional qualification (such as teaching, medicine or law) you may have to meet standards of behaviour set by the national professional body or by an institution you are working for (eg a school for students on the PGCE), or by the University under the Fitness to Practice or Fitness to Teach regulations.
7. These rules may expect you to uphold the reputation of the profession, or of an institution and so may cover a very broad range of conduct, including conduct which would otherwise be acceptable. An example could be a PGCE student posting criticism on Facebook about the partnership school he or she had been placed with.
8. Content you post on social media could result in you being in breach of these rules and if serious could result in you losing the opportunity to pursue your chosen profession.

Future Employment

9. Many employers now carry out an internet search before making offers of employment, so bear this in mind when posting material online, and when setting the privacy settings for your social media accounts (though noting that even privately posted material online may become public).

Civil and/or criminal legal action

10. Remember that various civil and criminal laws apply to content posted online.
11. Civil claims that could be brought include actions for defamation, harassment, breach of intellectual property rights, fraudulent misrepresentation or breach of confidence.

12. Criminal offences that could occur online include harassment, stalking, hate crimes, coercive or controlling behaviour, disclosing private sexual images without consent, blackmail, malicious communications and terrorism offences.

Intellectual Property

13. Be careful not to infringe copyright by posting others' content online (photographs, text, videos, music etc) without ensuring that you have permission to do this, including by checking the terms of any licence – for example, you may need to credit the author and/or link to the licence.
14. If you are posting an image of a logo or trademark, always check that you have permission to do this. You may have the photographer or designer's permission, but not necessarily that of the owner of the logo/trademark.
15. You should also consider checking the terms and conditions of social media accounts and/or websites before uploading material as by doing so you may be releasing ownership rights and control of content.

Confidentiality

16. Be careful not to post confidential material online without permission. This might be personal confidential information about an individual or information which is confidential for professional reasons. Examples could include trade secrets, confidential research data, personal information about another individual (such as information about their medical history, or sexuality) or details of complaints and/or legal proceedings).

Relationships with the College

17. The College is not responsible for, and does not hold any ownership of, any content posted on social media by its students.
18. When posting online there may be circumstances in which you risk giving the impression that you are speaking on behalf of the University or your department. If in doubt, you should consider adding a disclaimer to make it clear that you are posting in a personal capacity

How to complain about social media content

19. If you are concerned about material another student or member of staff has published on social media you should consider the following options
 - Firstly, speaking to the individual concerned directly, if you feel that it is safe to do so;
 - Taking informal steps to resolve the situation; and

- If the above steps are unsuccessful, making a formal complaint.
20. The appropriate informal steps, and the route for making a formal complaint will vary depending on what kind of content you are complaining about and the context in which it occurred. For example:
- Complaints about social media posts made by a student or member of staff in a college affecting students in that college should usually follow the [appropriate college procedures](#).
 - Complaints about posts amounting to harassment should follow the procedure set out in the college's harassment policy and procedure.
 - Other complaints about social media posts outside the college environment by students should be made to the Proctors.

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