

The Open University Student Computing Policy

Appendix 3: Using social networking tools: guidance for OU students

This guidance applies to you if you use a social networking site to talk with other students or to help your study. By social networks we mean any non-OU online tool that enables you to communicate or share content with others, such as blogs, wikis, Twitter and Facebook, but not email.

This document doesn't constitute legal advice. It is simply intended to advise and guide your engagement with social networking.

How are social networks used at the OU?

Formal OU presence

The OU has some formal presence in many social networking spaces (see the Community link in [StudentHome](#)). Often these are lightly monitored but not moderated. Your engagement with these OU social networks is usually optional.

OU modules and qualifications

OU modules and qualifications websites include online forums. Some modules may include some social networks such as Facebook, if so this would be detailed in the module description. For further information on using OU social networking tools please refer to the '[Conduct and content online](#)' section of the [OU Computing Guide](#).

The Open University Students' Association (OUSA)

Online forums are also used by OUSA for social and campaigning purposes. Please see [OUSA website](#) for more information.

Please remember that you are a member of an OU community that functions on the basis of mutual respect and responsibilities, and you are also expected to observe the code of conduct of the hosting services while in these spaces. Consequently, in addition to the terms and conditions of each hosting service (e.g. Facebook), you are also advised to read the following OU policy documents to better understand your wider responsibilities:

- [The Open University Student Computing Policy](#)
- [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#)
- [Code of Practice for Student Assessment](#)

OU student use of social networks

I want to set up a group related to my OU studies or an OU module

There are a couple of options available if you (either as a group or as an individual) want to set up an informal group for your fellow students.

- You can use the personal tools provided by the OU (these can be found on StudentHome). These are covered by all the OU's guidance and policies and are only available to the OU community (students and staff).
- You can choose to use non-OU social networking spaces.

You will need to adhere to the terms and conditions of the service you choose. If you discuss your study then remember that OU rules (e.g. on plagiarism or copyright) still apply. This means that you should not share assignment answers or module material. We will investigate and pursue any instances of plagiarism, academic collusion, copyright theft, or damage to the reputation of the OU brought to our attention. See policies and guidelines listed at the end of this document.

The Computing Helpdesk cannot provide any assistance in these external environments and your tutor is not required to participate in informal spaces set up by students, but be aware that members of OU staff could choose to join.

- If you use the name of The Open University, or any module code, qualification code or title you must make these groups or pages available at the most open option made available on the platform. This will make it easier for other students to follow and contribute to the discussion.
- You must make it absolutely clear that it is not an official OU group and that it is optional – this will help other students to understand that it is not a requirement for their module study and that the group will not be moderated like internal OU forums.
- If you create a group on an external social network you must not use the OU shield or other OU-owned content (text, images, videos audio etc.).

I have been asked to join someone's social networking space

The OU supplies a variety of methods and tools for keeping in touch with its students, tutors and other staff. Very occasionally a module will explicitly use a social networking tool and in those cases you will receive explicit advice and instructions in the module materials or via the module forum.

You should not feel any obligation to accept any other invitation to join a social networking group related to the OU, or to accept an association (such as becoming a friend on Facebook; or to follow or become a follower on Twitter). This rule applies whether the suggestion comes from other students or from a member of OU staff, including your tutor.

I want to use the OU shield and other OU images on a non-OU web area

This is only allowed very exceptionally. If you would like to use such content please contact the Digital Engagement team (email: digital-engagement@openmail.open.ac.uk) with your reasons.

If you do use content owned by the OU without permission you will be asked to remove it.

I want to publish my own material which is related to the OU.

You are free to post your thoughts or comments about the OU. However you should take care to avoid activity that:

- enables or promotes plagiarism e.g. sharing assignments

- infringes another person's privacy (e.g. by posting their contact details without permission or by quoting from an email or forum without the author's permission)
- makes untrue statements about the OU or OU material
- infringes the OU's copyright or intellectual property – this includes using the OU logo without permission or sharing study material.

I want to report bullying

If you feel that some comments infringe guidance on privacy or are bullying, you should report this to the social network platform owner. The provider is likely to pass the complaint to the person who set up the space or group.

How to respond to a bullying situation

These situations can be distressing. However, sometimes the best thing to do might be to withdraw from the situation, put it down to experience and move on. If you find yourself in such a situation you could try the following if you do not want to withdraw straight away:

- request the originator of the group to intervene and remove the offending posts
- if the originator of the group refuses to help, contact the hosting service that runs the site to ask for help
- if the hosting service cannot assist, you should remove yourself from the situation by relinquishing membership of the group.

I want to report some cheating

OU rules on assessment also apply in online environments outside of the OU (for example, in Facebook). This means that you should not share assignment answers or module material. We will investigate and pursue any instances of plagiarism, academic collusion, copyright theft, or damage to the reputation of the OU brought to our attention.

If you want to report a suspected incidence of cheating, please contact the [Student Casework Office](#).

What other OU policies apply to me in social networking spaces?

Usually it is the person or their behaviour that is relevant rather than the medium in which it happens. Many OU policies also apply to social networking sites. You are expected to adhere to the [Student Computing Policy](#) and to other OU policies including:

- [The Plagiarism Policy](#)
- [The Data Protection Policy](#);
- [The Code on personal relationships between staff and students](#)
- [The Safeguarding Policy](#) for protecting young people and vulnerable adults

These policies and guidelines can be found in [Essential Documents](#). Access to these and to information on how to make a complaint or appeal can be found in the [Help Centre](#) of Student