

The Open University Student Computing Policy

Appendix 3: Using Social Media: Policy for OU Students

1. Introduction

This policy applies to students who use social media. The social media policy and other associated guidelines are designed to help students communicate responsibly and to protect the reputation of The Open University. The use of social media is governed by the same policies and procedures applicable to all aspects of being a member of the university community. It is the responsibility of students to read and act in accordance with the principles of the social media policy and other associated policies and guidelines (see Section 6 below). This also applies to students who are on an approved study break.

2. Definition of ‘social media’

For the purposes of the social media policy, social media is defined as websites and online applications that enable users to create and share content or participate in social networking. These networks enable users to share ideas, opinions, knowledge and interests.

Examples of such social media include, but are not limited to:

- Twitter
- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Pinterest
- Flickr
- Vimeo
- Blogs
- Online chat forums

3. Guiding principles

To help protect the reputation of the University, we have adopted a number of guiding principles:

- The Open University has a number of official social media accounts that are actively managed and represent the work and views of the institution, for example, the main corporate ‘The Open University’ accounts on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). These accounts are monitored by University staff and any student posts or comments identified, assessed and responded to accordingly, and as soon as possible.

- The University monitors all public-facing references to The Open University in social media and will act upon any references or associations that could discredit the University. This could result in comments being hidden, accounts suspended or disciplinary action.
- Content shared on social media is subject to all the same privacy and copyright laws as other public channels. Students should familiarise themselves with Open University policies and guidelines in and be prepared to be held personally responsible if found to be breaking the law.
- The University's logo may only be used on official managed university social media accounts, any requests to use the logo in any way should be sent to the University's Communications Unit (social-media@open.ac.uk). This is separate to any Open University 'Twibbons' in circulation which can be used to demonstrate a student's association with the University.
- Students should feel no obligation to accept an invitation to join a social media group, page or accept a 'friend request' related to the university or their module of study. This rule applies whether the suggestion comes from another student, tutor or member of staff.

4. Responsibility of students in social media (personal accounts)

Students should not damage the reputation of the university while using social media in a personal capacity and should therefore adhere to the following:

- Any social media activity should not:
 - Do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of any individual (this will also be enforced through the social media platforms' own policies and guidelines, e.g Facebook).
 - Discredit the University through defamatory or inappropriate content and images
 - Breach copyright by using images or content without permission or failing to give due credit when permission has been granted.
 - Breach confidentiality by revealing confidential information relating to the University or any individual or organisation.
- Should a social media profile reference the fact an individual is a student of the university, it is acknowledged that public-facing comments made by the account holder are their own and do not reflect those of the university. This does not need to be explicitly stated in a student's social media profile.
- Students should be aware that members of staff, including associate lecturers (tutors), are not obliged to join informal groups on social media, 'follow' or 'be friends' with students.

5. Responsibility of students in social media (unofficial groups)

The University recognises that a number of students set up social media groups specifically to discuss their current module of study. These are classed as 'unofficial' accounts and, as such, are not the responsibility of the University. Unofficial groups (open or closed) are not monitored by the University, therefore it should be noted that:

- The responsibility for monitoring and managing the behaviours in ‘unofficial’ groups are the responsibility of the group administrator. It is the administrator’s responsibility to highlight the purpose of the account, membership and general rules of conduct.
- All users should familiarise themselves with and adhere to the social media platform’s own code of conduct, e.g Facebook
- The University’s logo cannot be used on ‘unofficial’ social media accounts.
- Any content posted in an open or closed unofficial group could be shared publicly and should in no way damage the reputation of the University

6. Related OU policies for students using social media

Many OU policies also apply to social networking sites. In addition to the terms and conditions of each platform (e.g. Facebook), you are expected to adhere to the Student Computing Policy and to other OU policies including:

- [Code of Practice for Student Discipline](#)
- [Code of Practice for Student Assessment](#)
- [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

7. Misuse of social media

The University has the right to request removal of content from an official, managed social media account or from a personal social media account if it is deemed to be counter to this or other University policies and guidelines.

8. Further social media guidance

You will find further information and guidelines relating to the use of social media at The Open University within the University’s online social media toolkit at www.open.ac.uk/smt