

Social Media Policy: Students

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 The University of Worcester is committed to promoting the principles of freedom of speech so far as is reasonably practicable within the law. The University also wishes to promote a positive study culture for students both in person and online.
- 1.2 This policy has been compiled to help students understand the reputational, legal and ethical implications of social media usage and what happens when it is misused, intentionally or otherwise. It seeks to protect students and the wider University community from the misuse of social media and clarify where and how existing University policies and guidelines apply to social media use.

2. Overview

- 2.1 The University is committed to doing all that it reasonably practicably can to secure freedom of speech within the law as it is one of the fundamental principles upon which the University is founded. This is expanded upon in the University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech. Nothing in this policy should be read as undermining or conflicting with the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech. In the event there is a conflict between this policy and the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech, the Code of Practice shall take precedence.

3. What is Social Media?

- 3.1 Social media refers to online platforms and applications that enable users to create and share content as well as to interact and communicate with others. These platforms are continually evolving and any examples referenced in this policy represent a subset at the time the policy was published. New platforms will be released and others will change, merge or cease to operate. Currently the platforms generally comprise websites and apps and can host a variety of content, including messaging, hosting of files and materials such as text, photos, videos and audio. Examples include Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok.
- 3.2 Through social media, individuals can connect with friends, colleagues, and people from the wider community, follow trends, join discussions including participation in global conversations. Social media can include messaging platforms that have restricted access to content such as WhatsApp and Snapchat.

4. Scope

- 4.1 This policy applies to all students of the University of Worcester who engage in online conversations or share content in the context of a social network. It extends to students' use of social media in a personal capacity where this impacts the University, its students, staff or the wider community.
- 4.2 The policy does not cover social media usage by University staff which is covered in a separate policy, nor does it apply to the use of social media in research which is encompassed by the process of ethical approval outlines in the Research Ethics Policy.
- 4.3 Students who breach this policy may be subject to disciplinary action under the Student Disciplinary Procedure.

5. General Principles when using Social Media

- 5.1 Students should not declare, imply or indicate that their content or views are representative of those of the University.
- 5.2 Individuals are personally responsible for their communications through social media. Students should remember that what they publish may be readily available to the public (including the University, prospective future employers, the media and social acquaintances) for a long time. This should be kept in mind when posting content. Posting inappropriate content can damage career prospects, since potential (and current) employers often screen social media sites when considering applications.
- 5.3 Social media should not be used to verbally abuse or intimidate other students, staff or members of the public. Respect should be shown at all times for other people's privacy. Before posting pictures, videos or details of another person students should be certain that the other person consents to this. Care should be taken to avoid language, behaviour and/or treatment which is disrespectful, abusive or insulting and which breaches the University's Harassment and Bullying Policy or Student Code of Conduct.
- 5.4 Students should not post:
 - a. Material that is discriminatory, harassing, libellous or defamatory
 - b. Material that infringes the intellectual property rights of another person including copyright
 - c. Material that is illegal
 - d. Material which may incite violence
 - e. Messages, images or other media that are likely to have a serious impact on the University's reputation or disrupt the normal operations of the University.

- 5.5 The University's logo, coat of arms and name are registered trademarks. Therefore, the University prohibits the use of its logo(s) or shield as a social network profile picture, background image and cover photos, without the explicit permission of the PVC Communications & Engagement. It also prohibits the use of its name or derivatives thereof within the account name of a social network account, by individuals or organisations without the explicit permission of the PVC Communications & Engagement. Students' Union clubs and societies are required to seek approval from the SU Managers to use the University's logo(s) or shield on social media platforms.

6. Compliance with related University policies

- 6.1 Social media should never be used in a way that violates any other University policies to which students are subject. If a post would violate any of the University's policies in another forum, it will also violate them in an online forum.
- 6.2 Anybody is free to talk about the University on social media sites, however students must not share confidential information, or make personal attacks on staff members or other students.
- 6.3 Therefore, in all cases where it is believed that this policy has been breached, considerable judgement will be exercised to consider the context behind the issue and the impact of the action, particularly when it affects the right to protest. However, please be aware that false or malicious remarks which may bring the University, its staff or students into disrepute may constitute misconduct, and disciplinary action may be taken.
- 6.4 The University reserves the right to investigate concerns that may arise regarding students through means including social media or other online presence. The University may request the removal of content if it is deemed to pose a risk to the University or to one of its staff or students.

7. Use of Social Media between Staff and Students

- 7.1 Students should only contact members of University staff via the staff member's University account (email or Teams). Students should not use social media to correspond or engage with members of University staff in relation to their studies and they should not expect members of University staff to respond to them via social media. The only exception to this is in the context of approved assessment, see 6.2.
- 7.2 There are instances where the use of shared social media by students and a member of staff may arise (i.e. developing a LinkedIn presence forms part of approved assessment).

In these instances, the use of social media for staff and students to communicate is permissible.

8. Students on Placements including Professionally Recognised Courses

8.1 Students on placement should not post:

- a. Information or material that may bring the placement provider into disrepute
- b. The name of placement providers, unless the provider's own policy allows them to do so, placement/service users, placement mentors/educators or staff.
- c. Pictures or videos of placement/service users, placement mentors or supervisors or staff.
- d. Pictures of fellow students may only be posted with express consent.
- e. Comments about placement/service users, mentors and staff.
- f. Personal information relating to placement/service users, mentors and staff.

8.2 Students on placement should comply with any social media policies of their placement provider.

8.3 Students, particularly on professional recognised courses, have a responsibility to uphold public confidence in their chosen profession and where applicable to adhere to the relevant professional code of conduct (i.e. NMC, GMC, HCPC).

8.4 Students on professionally recognised courses who do not comply with the requirements of this policy and/or the relevant profession's regulatory body may be subject to action being taken under the [Fitness to Practice Procedure](#).

9. General Help & Support with using Social Media

9.1 Each social media platform has its unique features, privacy settings and audience. Being knowledgeable about these aspects ensures that students can make informed decisions about the content they post and who can view it. By understanding platform-specific nuances and guidelines, students can harness the benefits of the platform, avoid potential pitfalls, and seek support when needed.

9.2 Students are strongly advised to explore a platform's help or FAQ sections for guidance and to regularly review privacy settings to maintain control their digital footprint.

9.3 Guidance for students

- a. **Understand Privacy Settings:** Stay updated with the privacy settings of various platforms and adjust them to fit the content and the desired audience.
- b. **Be Aware of the Public Nature of Platforms:** Always remember that content shared on social media, even in private profiles or closed groups, can be accessed, shared and archived by others. Private posts can become public and potentially be available indefinitely.
- c. **Consider Content:** Before posting any comment, image or video, think about its appropriateness and whether you would be comfortable with fellow students, colleagues, University staff or the outside public viewing it.
- d. **Do Not Engage In Inappropriate Behaviour:** Any form of harassment or bullying via social media should be reported to the University via the University Report a Concern portal accessed from MyDay.
- e. **Do Not Share Prohibited Content:** Students should refrain from sharing or endorsing inappropriate content, including but not limited to, offensive slurs or materials promoting illegal activities.
- f. **Protect Your Information And That of Others:** Prioritise your safety, privacy, and the rights of others.

10. Related Policies and Documents

The following policies and procedures are relevant to this policy

- [Regulations for the Use of IT Services and Resources](#)
- [Guidance on Digital Communications web pages](#)
- [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#)
- [Student Disciplinary Procedures](#)
- [Student Charter](#)
- [Bullying And Harassment Policy](#)
- [Fitness to Practice Procedures](#)
- [Relationships at work policy](#)