

Social Media Guidance

1. Social media can bring enormous benefits and opportunities to an academic community, including by enabling global communication and collaboration and promoting healthy and lively academic debate.
2. There is, however, an inherent risk involved in using social media, in that it is an instantaneous and far reaching form of communication and inappropriate use has the potential to cause serious, and sometimes unexpected and long-term, consequences.
3. The University encourages you to engage, collaborate and innovate through social media; however, wherever and however you do this, you must be aware of the potential impact on you and other users.

What is Social Media?

4. 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 *TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Facebook and X*.

Freedom of Speech & Academic Freedom

5. 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

6. 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:
 - Who'll be reading your post? Will it be limited to close friends and family or could it be read by the wider public? Could it be seen by people you have, or might one day have, a professional relationship with?
 - 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 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.
7. IT Services have published some helpful guidance on etiquette in emailing and on newsgroups, much of which will be applicable for social media as well: <http://help.it.ox.ac.uk/email/netiquette/index>.

Consequences of posting inappropriate material

8. The Code of Discipline
9. Using social media to post offensive comments, images or other content may be a breach of the Code of Discipline under [Statute XI](#) and could result in disciplinary action by the Proctors.
10. Such material could constitute:
 - A. "harassment" under Section 2(m) of the Code of Discipline, as defined in the University's [Harassment Policy](#); or
 - B. a breach of section 2(h) of the Code of Discipline: engaging in "violent, indecent disorderly, threatening or offensive behaviour or language".

Professional Courses

11. 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.
12. 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.
13. 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

14. 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.

Civil and/or criminal legal action

15. Remember that various civil and criminal laws apply to content posted online.
16. Civil claims that could be brought include actions for defamation, harassment, breach of intellectual property rights, fraudulent misrepresentation or breach of confidence.
17. 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

18. 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.
19. 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.
20. 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

21. 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 University

22. The University is not responsible for, and does not hold any ownership of, any content posted on social media by its students.
23. 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

24. 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.
25. 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 social media posts in the context of a University club should follow the club's complaints procedure;
 - Complaints about posts amounting to harassment should follow the procedure set out in the [Harassment Policy](#), which provides that initial advice can be sought from the Director of Student Welfare and Support Services and that Complaints against staff are decided by the Head of Department, while Complaints against students are decided by the Proctors.
 - Other complaints about social media posts by students should be made to the Proctors.
26. The Proctors will not investigate complaints which are frivolous or vexatious, or where the alleged misconduct is not sufficiently serious to warrant investigation and disciplinary action.

University Guidelines and Regulations

27. The University's *Code of Discipline* (in Statute XI), *Policy and Procedure on Harassment and Regulations Relating to the use of Information Technology Facilities* are especially relevant to social media interactions; for example, the harassment policy states that harassment can take place through communications via any form of electronic media or mobile communications device, and the IT regulations set out the obligations on users relating to the University's IT equipment and network and explain the circumstances in which users' data may be examined. The code, the harassment policy and procedure and the IT regulations are, along with other University regulations and policies that you should be aware of and comply with whilst a student of the University, explained and linked to in the *University Student Handbook*.

[University Student Handbook](#)

28. Other guidance available in the University includes:

[Network Etiquette for Email and Newsgroups](#) – Guidelines from IT services on communications through email or newsgroup postings

[Department for Continuing Education: Guidance on online netiquette](#) – This is guidance specifically aimed at students taking online courses, in which there will be online discussion groups within a Moodle VLE.

[Summary of IT Rules](#) – this page from IT Services contains links to all of the University's Regulations, Information and Guidance relating to the use of University IT and communications facilities, and links to IT agreements with external bodies which apply in certain scenarios (eg creating a website for a University project or collecting or publishing research data).

[Staff Social Media Guidelines](#)