Social Media Policy

Table of Contents

Aim

The University recognises the benefits and opportunities presented by social media. Our employees are encouraged to use social media across research, education and professional networking. When doing so, it is important that employees behave responsibly, respectfully, and with due regard to the values we share as a community.

1. Policy Statement

1.1   This policy provides information about the University's approach to the use of all types of Social Media, highlighting best practice and protecting employees, managers and the University itself from inappropriate, damaging and abusive behaviour.

2. Scope

2.1   This policy applies to all employees of the University of Essex, both academic and professional, and those on all types of employment contract. The policy outlines the need to establish professional boundaries, respect, confidentiality and protect personal wellbeing when using any social media. A range of support is available to our staff to support them to use social media effectively. It is important to note that all of our policies and guidance apply online as they do in all other areas.

3. Definitions

3.1   Social media are defined as any online communication generally encouraging participation and exchange. Common social media platforms include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Instagram. This policy also covers email networks and communication tools that are used internally at the University (this includes instant messaging functionality within Zoom and MSTeams). Social media for the purposes of this policy includes without limitation all social networking sites, internet postings and blogs or v-logs. It applies to the uses of social media for business purposes as well as personal use that may affect the University in any way.

3.2   The audience for information exchanged using social media can be unrestricted and unknown, and it is important to remember that communication in closed or restricted groups might be shared more widely by the recipients. Audiences, intentional or otherwise, might include colleagues at the University, potential, current or past students, peers in other institutions, research or business partners, and members of the public.

4. Role and responsibilities

4.1 Employees are responsible for:

- Using Social Media responsibly with consideration for others and the University's values

- Behaving professionally when using Social Media in line with this policy

Managers are responsible for:

- Sharing the Social Media Policy with members of their team and making them aware of their responsibilities

- Supporting colleagues who experience or may have been affected by offensive or upsetting comments on social media either about themselves or their colleagues.

- Signposting colleagues to the support provided by the University. This could include health and wellbeing support and specialist expertise in communications.

People and Culture are responsible for:

- Signposting managers and employees to information and advising on the use and management of Social Media.

- Providing wellbeing services and support for colleagues who experience offensive or upsetting comments on social media

- Maintaining the Social Media Policy

5. Use of social media

5.1   Our commitment to academic freedom, freedom of speech within the law and inclusion underpins our expectations of how our employees engage with social media. Freedom of speech is an essential part of academic and University life and flourishes where there is tolerance of, and respect for, a wide range of views and beliefs.

5.2   In using social media, whether personal accounts or on official University media channels, it is important that employees exercise their freedom responsibly and in line with the University's values. Employees should behave as professionally as they would in the workplace. Particular care should be taken when interacting with students or prospective students online. Employees must remember that

when they post on social media, it might be interpreted as representing or speaking on behalf of the University, whether intended or not.

5.3   Social media may be used by the University in its recruitment, as a tool for attracting and engaging with candidates from a wider pool, and to enhance the recruitment process. Information seen on social media should not be used for the purposes of making shortlisting, interview or appointment decisions relating to potential candidates. If you become aware of any information posted by a candidate on social media that raises concerns about their suitability, you should discuss this with the panel Chair who should refer to the Director of Employee Relations and Reward or Head of Resourcing for advice before making any shortlisting, interview or appointment decision. Where any such information is considered, the University will act in accordance with its data protection and equal opportunities obligations.

5.4   You should never use social media in a way that breaches any of the University's other policies. If a statement would be in breach of any of the University's policies in another forum, it would also be in breach of them in an online forum. This includes any activity that would be defined as harassment, bullying or hate incidents – as set out and defined in Our Zero Tolerance Approach to Harassment and Bullying. Publication or sharing of any material or comments which are illegal, defamatory, damaging to the reputation of the University or contrary to the University's conduct regulations will lead to investigation, may result in action under the University's Disciplinary Procedures and could potentially lead to the involvement of the police.

5.5   The Whistleblowing Policy sets out how employees can raise serious concerns that are in the public interest. Individuals who make disclosures under the terms of the policy will be protected and supported.

6. Establishing professional boundaries on social media

6.1   The University respects privacy and understands that employees will use social media in their private lives. It is therefore important to establish private and professional boundaries on social media so far as possible. This can be done in various ways:

- Using different platforms for personal and professional use. For example, Facebook for personal use; Twitter for professional use.

- Having different identities on the same tool.

- By checking and amending privacy settings in each tool.

6.2   However, it is important to note that posting in a personal capacity or anonymously or using a different identity does not allow individuals to engage in behaviour that would be in breach of the

normal standards of conduct the University expects from any colleague and reflected in the University's employment framework. Employees may add a disclaimer explaining that the views expressed are theirs alone and that they do not represent the views of their employer. However, if the content of a post is in breach of any University policy, for example, it contains personally offensive comments about a colleague, a disclaimer would not prevent the University taking action should the circumstances warrant this.

7. Protect your wellbeing

7.1   It is important to take precautions to ensure personal safety and to protect against identity theft (e.g. when sharing personal details).

7.2   Social media posts can attract inappropriate or offensive comment from others in professional and /or personal contexts. Such behaviour can have a detrimental impact on your wellbeing, and you are encouraged to access the wellbeing support available at the University if you have been affected by inappropriate or offensive comments made online. Your manager can provide more information about the wellbeing support available, following consultation with People & Culture if needed.

7.3 If you see a post about your work for the University that concerns you, including your academic work, please speak to your line manager as soon as possible.

7.4 Inappropriate or offensive comments about you made on a University of Essex account can usually be taken down immediately, where this is considered to be appropriate. In these cases, you can seek advice on removing the content from Communications and External Relations (CER).

7.5 The University is not able to remove content from external sites. Where comments are personally offensive and may constitute 'trolling' or harassment, the provider can be asked to remove the post. Advice on removing content can be sought from Communications and External Relations (CER). In some cases, you may be advised to disengage from any exchange as the most effective way of avoiding escalation.

7.6 Where comments are potentially defamatory, this is a private civil matter for any individual. The University can provide a range of practical and wellbeing support to employees who are adversely affected by social media posts.

8. Confidentiality

8.1   The informal nature of social media can lead to individuals revealing information that is not appropriate. For example:

■   Personal information about other people, including contact details and pictures, should never be shared without their consent. The Information Security Policy applies to social media activity.

- University business which is confidential or not in the public domain should not be disclosed. If in any doubt, the Head of Department or Section should be consulted.

- Intellectual property must be protected. Although social media can be a useful tool for research and networking, care should be taken to protect research if work is at an early stage. Similarly, the permission of others should be sought before referencing or sharing their work. Some social media platforms may have terms and conditions that give them intellectual property rights to anything posted on the site. You should always check before posting information.

9. University sources of support and information

9.1   There is a range of support available to help employees to engage positively with social media and to establish and manage a presence in the digital world. This includes ` to help colleagues make the most of social media, including a course on Moodle.

9.2   Concerns about work-related abuse or threats through social media should be reported to your line manager and through the University's Health and Safety incident reporting process. The University also has a Zero Tolerance Approach to Harassment and Bullying with a report and support system.

10. Related university policies and procedures

- Zero Tolerance Approach to Harassment and Bullying

- Guidelines for the use of IT facilities

- Information Security Policy

- Intellectual Property Policy

- Our suite of employment policies including Disciplinary Policy

- Whistleblowing Policy

- Staff Recruitment and Selection Policy

11. Equality, diversity and inclusion statement

We are committed to meeting our obligations under the Equality Act 2010 (EA), which requires the University not to discriminate as required by law on account of age, disability, gender reassignment*, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The University will always act lawfully and this may include taking action to support people with particular protected characteristics, including disability and sex. In addition to its obligations under the EA, the University shall adopt policies, practices, and procedures that define expected standards of behaviour and specify any additional characteristics, beyond those required by law, to which protection is provided, for example, in relation to political belief, social background and refugee status.

*The University's policies, practices and procedures specifically extend to all gender identities including trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people.

For the purposes of this Policy Statement the term 'trans' is an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. The term 'non-binary' is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity does not sit comfortably with 'woman' or 'man'. Non-binary identities are varied and can include people who identify with some aspects of binary identities, while others reject them entirely.

12. Monitoring

The operation of this policy will be monitored on behalf of USG by the People, Culture and Inclusion Advisory Group as part of its role to monitor on behalf of USG, the implementation of the University's people strategies, policies and practices, including those relating to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI); promote dissemination of good people management practice throughout the University and draw to the attention of USG any areas of concern requiring attention.

13. Policy information

Title: Social Media Policy

Policy Classification: Policy

Security Classification: Open

Security Rationale: None

Nominated Contact: Head of Employment Policy and Engagement

Responsible UoE Section: People and Culture

Approval Body: USG

Signed Off Date: February 2022

Last Review Date: July 2022

Minimum Review Frequency: 3-Yearly

Policy Review Expiry Date: 31 July 2025