Social media policy

The growth in social media, particularly social networking sites, has created increased opportunity for media communications that have an impact upon the University.

The term 'social media' is used here to describe websites and applications that enable users to create and share content and/or to participate in social networking

While the University has clear guidelines and policies regarding other aspects of its operation, eg human resources, IT and corporate identity, these do not explicitly cover the usage of social media.

The purpose of these social media guidelines is as follows:

- to encourage good practice
- to protect the University, its staff and students
- to clarify where and how existing policies and guidelines apply to social media
- to promote effective and innovative use of social media as part of the University's activities

In particular any official University social networking site/group must be approved by the University's Digital Marketing Officer (digitalmarketing@essex.ac.uk). All sites must have a designated administrator who is responsible for the content of the site.

General guidelines

1. All current University of Essex policies concerning staff and students also apply to the use of social media. These include HR policies, codes of conduct, corporate branding policies, acceptable use of IT and disciplinary procedures. The following policies and guidelines are of particular importance:

   - Guidelines for the use of IT Facilities
   - Data Protection policies
   - managing email
   - Electronic Information Security Policy
   - Policy on Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk (.pdf)
   - IPR and copyright guidance
   - Corporate brand guidelines:
     - the University of Essex brand

2. Departments contacting alumni must consult the Advancement Office first.
3. Staff and students should take effective precautions when utilising social networking sites to ensure their own personal safety and to protect against identity theft.
4. Staff and students need to consider intellectual property rights, copyright and ownership of data when using social media.
5. The University supports staff using social media where it adds value to existing services; social media should not, however, be used where existing supported services offer equivalent functionality.
6. Where staff use social media for personal purposes at work this should be done in line with current IT guidelines and any local management guidance.
7. Individuals should exercise caution when interacting with, and responding to, potentially contentious posts on social media sites.
8. The University will continually review the use of social media and may modify its policies should the status of particular social media sites change, eg if charges are introduced,
changes made to the way content is used, terms of use are changed, or if a site closes down.

Encouraged practice

10. Academic uses – the University recognises that social media has the potential to support/advance learning opportunities and encourages its use in this way; social media should not, however, be used where existing supported learning technologies offer equivalent functionality.

11. Collaborative uses – the University supports both internal (eg inter-department) and external (eg inter-university) collaboration and recognises that social media may provide opportunities for people and organisations to work together.

12. Communications and External Relations uses – the University recognises the opportunity to communicate with prospective and existing customers through social media as part of an integrated marketing strategy.

13. Prospective and current students' uses - these users, along with others who have an interest in the University, are active in social media, eg setting up Facebook groups and blogging. Communications and External Relations will monitor these sites to get further insight into the needs of its customers. Possible responses to any contentious issues identified in unofficial social media sites should be referred to the Digital Marketing Officer, (digitalmarketing@essex.ac.uk).

14. Alumni uses – the University recognises the opportunity to communicate with existing students and alumni through social media to develop an on-going relationship with them. These uses are the responsibility of the Advancement Office, who have ultimate responsibility for alumni contact details.

15. Students' Union uses – the University understands that the Students' Union will want to use social media to maximise the exposure of its services and the associated societies to existing and prospective students. These uses are the responsibility of the Students' Union.

Other potential uses

16. The University will not refer to social networking sites when assessing student applications and job applications unless such sites are specifically highlighted in the application. The University will assess all applications only on the information provided. Further details can be obtained from the Human Resources.

17. The University may refer to social networking sites when investigating breaches of discipline, eg cheating, harassment, anti-social behaviour. The Student Appeals, Complaints and Conduct and Office can provide further information on student disciplinary procedures.

18. The University may monitor forums and blogs to gain indirect feedback on University services and facilities. The University may post replies on forums or blogs to answer queries or address factual corrections, but would generally take a cautious approach before getting involved in contentious issues.

19. The University reserves the right to take any necessary steps to protect its facilities, staff and students from malware (malicious software) including blocking sites where this is an issue.