University of Essex

Social Media Policy

Table of Contents

Aim

We recognise 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 we behave responsibly, respectfully, and lawfully.

1. Policy Statement

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

2. Scope and exclusions

2.1   The procedure applies to all permanent and fixed-term employees at the University of Essex, regardless of length of service, during their employment with the University. Employees of the University of Essex Campus Services (UECS) or Wivenhoe House Hotel have their own specific policies and procedures. This policy does not form part of the contract of employment, and we reserve the right to amend or withdraw it at any time.

2.2   Any breach of the social media policy will be managed through the University's disciplinary procedure.

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, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat and Whatsapp. 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 include 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. These examples will be updated from time to time, but this policy applies to all social media use whether or not expressly listed in this paragraph.

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

- behaving professionally when using social *media* in line with this policy

4.2 Line Managers are responsible for:

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

- supporting employees who experience or may have been affected by offensive or upsetting comments on social media either about themselves or other employees

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

4.3 People & Culture are responsible for:

- signposting line 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 lawfully. 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 staff 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 Social media should never be used 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 <u>Our Zero Tolerance Approach to Harassment and Bullying</u>. Publication or sharing of any material or comments which are illegal, contrary to the University's policies, 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 When sharing information on social media employees must not:

Post anything that could be perceived as discrimination, harassment or bullying, for example by:

- making unlawful comments about other employees, students or any third party

- using social media to bully another individual

- posting images that are discriminatory or otherwise illegal

Breach confidentiality, for example by:

- giving away confidential information about an identifiable individual (such as an employee or student)

- posting details about ongoing investigations or proceedings under employee or student procedures

- giving away confidential University information

Breach copyright, for example by:

- using another party's literary, dramatic, musical or artistic work without permission, where permission would be needed

- using the University's trademark(s) or logo(s) without permission. The University's trademarks and logos are the property of the University, and advance approval for their use must be obtained from the Communications and External Relations team

5.6 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.

5.7   The University reserves the right to moderate its own social media and communication channels and may remove content at its own discretion. External social media posts can be brought to the attention of the University if any official University accounts are tagged or mentioned in published content.

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; X (formerly 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 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 a lawful basis. The _Information Security Policy_ (.pdf) 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 at every 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. Academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law

9.1   We are committed to securing and promoting academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law, which we promote as core values and vital components of being an inclusive community. Academic freedom and freedom of speech are essential parts of academic and University life, and flourish where there is tolerance of a wide range of ideas and opinions which are lawfully expressed. Promoting the lawful expression of diverse ideas and opinions or the sharing of information by means of speech, writing, images (including in electronic form) or through events that we hold, including the lawful expression of ideas and opinions that some may find objectionable or offensive, is an important part of our responsibility to be inclusive. It enables

all members of the University to feel able to express their ideas and opinions within the law and be encouraged to be active members of our university community.

9.2 *Our Code of Practice: Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speec*h (.pdf) affirms our commitment to securing and promoting academic freedom, freedom of speech within Higher Education and inclusion within the law and our founding charter also enshrines academic freedom within the law. The management of complaints or concerns about academic freedom and freedom of speech within the law in relation to action taken or not taken by the University is explained in the *University's Freedom of Speech Complaints Policy* (.pdf)

10. Equality impact assessment

10.1   The University has conducted an Equality Impact Assessment on this policy and is satisfied that its application should not result in a differential and negative impact on any groups of employees identified under the Equality Act 2010.

11. Monitoring

11.1   People, Culture, and Inclusion Advisory Group will monitor the impact of this policy.

12. University sources of support and information

12.1 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.

12.2 Concerns about work-related abuse or threats through social media should be reported to line managers 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.

■ Health and Wellbeing

■ Work-Related Stress

■ Coaching Essentials for Line Managers

■ Report and Support

■ Mental Health First Aid

■ Employee Assistance Programme

■ Academic freedom staff support procedure (.pdf)

13. Related university policies and procedures

- Zero Tolerance Approach to Harassment and Bullying

- Guidelines for the use of IT facilities

- Information Security Policy (.pdf)

- Intellectual Property Policy

- Our suite of employment policies including Disciplinary Policy

- Whistleblowing Policy

- Staff Recruitment and Selection Policy

- Code of Practice: Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech (.pdf)

- Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech: Staff Support Procedure

Document Control Panel

Field	Description
Title	Social Media Policy
Policy Classification	Policy
Security Classification	Open
Security Rationale	N/A
Policy Manager Role	Head of Employment Policy and Engagement
Nominated Contact	develop@essex.ac.uk
Responsible UoE Section	People & Culture
Approval Body	University Steering Group
Signed Off Date	October 2024
Publication Status	Published
Published Date	October 2024
Last Review Date	July 2024
Minimum Review Frequency	3-Yearly
Review Date	September 2027
UoE Identifier	0159

If you require this document in an alternative format, such as braille, please contact the nominated contact at develop@essex.ac.uk.