Social Media Policy
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Summary:

This policy aims to protect students, staff and the reputation of the University from the negative effects of misuse of Social Media, whilst at the same time promote positive engagement with this critical communication tool.

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1. About this policy

1.1. The University of Winchester ('the University') is committed to delivering a creative, engaging and strategic approach to communications. Social Media provides wide-ranging opportunities to connect, collaborate, engage and innovate across a range of platforms. However, as an instantaneous, public, and wide-reaching form of communication, there are inherent risks both to the individual and to the reputation of the University.

1.2. The University aims to use social media to engage with students (both enrolled and prospective), employees, alumni, stakeholders and the public.

1.3. The aim of this policy is to encourage positive engagement with social media and good practice in the responsible use of it. The policy sets out the University's expected standards and should be considered alongside the contents of our Social Media Guidance. This guidance outlines important information and examples of when an employee or student might be considered to misuse social media, as well as advice on how to safely use social media to maximise the benefits whilst minimizing the potential risk for both individual users and the University reputation.

1.4. While acknowledging the right of staff and students to freedom of expression, the University has an obligation to protect the wellbeing and reputation of individual employees and students, as well as the reputation of the institution. This policy exists to minimise the risks to employees and students at the University through the inappropriate use of social media, to ensure that these channels are not being used to harass or harm others and to avoid any unjustified reputational, legal or ethical issues arising from the misuse of social media.

2. Scope of this policy

2.1. This policy deals with the use of all forms of social media. For the purpose of this policy 'Social Media' is defined as forms of communication through which users participate in online communities, sharing information, news, opinions, interests, celebrating success and sending personal messages. Communication on social media may include posting, commenting, instant messaging, sharing links, text, images, video and other files or reacting to another users' content.

2.2. Examples of social media covered by this policy include, but are not limited to: Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter/X, SnapChat, WhatsApp, YouTube, Reddit, WeChat, Weibo, Pinterest and all other social networking sites, forums and blogs.

2.3. This policy applies to all staff and students at the University, including associate and visiting lecturers, casual or contract staff. It applies to all public and/or professional communications within any social media platform, regardless of location, including away from campus and on personal devices, whether to an individual directly, to a limited group or a public post, but only to the extent that they constitute unlawful behaviour, misuse, or a breach of this policy.

2.4. Staff and students should be aware that NO social media use is ever guaranteed to be completely private. Similarly, an individual's status as an employee of the University may be discernible even if not openly disclosed by that employee: social media posts are capable of being forwarded, reposted and commented upon. Private messages can be screenshot and manipulated. Therefore, this policy applies to private communications but only where they break the law or constitute a breach of your employment contract or other University policies.

2.5. The University is committed to upholding the rights of our students and staff to Freedom of Expression and academic freedom of speech. we recognise that lawful speech includes the right for our students and staff to hold opinions, to share ideas, and receive information and ideas without unjustified interference from the University. The University is equally committed to academic freedom, which is critical to our mission. Nothing in our commitment to freedom of speech is an excuse for abuse, bullying, discrimination, harassment, hatred, intimidation, violence or any act prohibited by law.

2.6. This policy will be regularly reviewed to reflect the changing nature of social media and its use. Any changes will be agreed through the University Leadership Team.

2.7. This policy should be read alongside the advice included on the Social Media Guidance intranet pages and other University policies, including:

    a) Policy for student use of social media

    b) ICT Acceptable Use Policy

    c) Dignity at work

    d) Data protection policy

e)   Relationships Policy and Procedure

f)   Equality and Diversity Policy

g)   Bullying and Harassment Policy

h)   Conduct Policy for Students

i)   Disciplinary Procedures for Students

j)   Disciplinary Policy for Staff

k)   Gender Identity and Reassignment Policy

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1. All staff and students are responsible for:
   a)   ensuring that any use of social media is conducted in line with this and other relevant policies;
   b)   adding an appropriate disclaimer to personal accounts (see Social Media Guidance for example disclaimer);
   c)   reporting and escalating matters as appropriate.

3.2. Staff operating a social media account in an official capacity are responsible for:

   a)   ensuring the University's Marketing, Communications & Engagement team is informed and has approved when an account representing a function of the University is to be created;
   b)   regularly monitoring, updating and managing content they have posted;
   c)   managing security and passwords of institutional accounts, including handovers to relevant staff as required;
   d)   reporting and escalating matters as appropriate;
   e)   ensuring copyright laws are not breached by avoiding use of images or content (including music) without express permission and by giving due credit where permission has been granted;
   f)   obtaining and managing signed model release forms (see Social Media Guidance) for students, staff or other contributors that can be identified in their marketing materials;
   g)   Completing CMA training.

3.3. All line managers and student-facing staff (e.g. personal tutor, Head of Department, Student Services, housing assistants) are responsible (as applicable)   for:

   a)   addressing any concerns and/or questions arising from the use of social media by those representing a part of the University where staff or student wellbeing is at risk, or the use is in breach of this policy. This can include queries relating to posts or comments, and support for this can be sought from line managers or the Marketing, Communications and Engagement Team.

3.4. The Marketing, Communications and Engagement team is responsible for:

a) authorising the use of relevant social media for marketing purposes by those representing a part of the University; and
b) providing guidance and templates to assist staff with the promotion of the University Courses, Services and Research.

4. Expected Standard of Behaviour when using Social Media

4.1. Staff and students are personally responsible for what they communicate on or through social media and they must adhere to the standards of behaviour set out in this policy and any related policies (see section 2.7).

4.2. Staff and students must not use social media in a way or post anything that:

    a) Could be considered to harass, bully or unlawfully discriminate against employees, students or third parties. The following examples illustrate the types of behaviour which the University considers to be forms of cyber bullying:

- Maliciously spreading rumours, lies or gossip

- Intimidating or aggressive behaviour

- Offensive or threatening comments or content

- Posting comments/photos/screenshots etc. deliberately mocking an individual with the intent to harass or humiliate them

    b) Is threatening, harassing, discriminatory, illegal, obscene, indecent, defamatory, or hostile towards any individual or entity

    c) Discriminates on the grounds of race, sex and gender identity, pregnancy, disability, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political or religious belief or contravenes the University's Equality and Diversity Policy

    d) Engages in any activity that constitutes a criminal offence

    e) Makes false or misleading statements

    f) Impersonates University employees, students or third parties or uses fake accounts or another person's name without their consent

    g) Breaches copyright

    h) Divulges University confidential or commercially sensitive information or reveals personal information about a University employee, student, client or customer (data, contact details or photographs) without their permission on social media, whether during or after your time as an employee.

    i) Expresses opinions on the University's behalf via social media, unless expressly authorised to do so by the Director of Communications and Marketing or an identified representative (you may be required to undergo training in order to obtain such authorisation).

4.3. The University takes complaints and concerns from students and

employees very seriously. There are formal and appropriate ways for complaints to be raised (see 5. Breach of this policy). It is unacceptable for employees to post details of complaints, disciplinary proceedings and/or legal proceedings/potential legal proceedings involving the University on Social Media. Doing so may result in further investigation or disciplinary action.

4.4. The University will investigate any claims made about cyber bullying by another employee, a student or member of the public. Any student or employee who is found to be experiencing cyber bullying by another employee, a student or, in the course of their employment, by a member of the public, will have the full support of the University. (See 5. Breach of this policy),

Using social media in an official capacity

4.5. The University maintains corporate accounts across most major social media channels managed by the Marketing, Communications & Engagement department. These corporate accounts have large followings and are a useful way for the University to communicate with the various groups we serve.

4.6. Other areas within the University may wish to create social media profiles, for example an Academic Department or Professional Service. Before creating a new account or when taking over responsibility for one, employees should first meet with the Marketing, Communications & Engagement department to discuss best practice for setting up and managing these accounts. Details of the account, including login details, should be maintained centrally by the Marketing, Communications & Engagement department. Please see the separate guidance about this.

4.7. All official communication between University staff and students will be conducted through University Canvas, Microsoft Teams, University email and the University Intranet. Employees are not required to use social media to communicate with students. If an employee does wish to use social media to communicate with a cohort of current students or prospective students, this should be done via official University accounts rather than their personal account. These social media accounts should make it clear that the user is an employee of the University.

4.8. If an employee intends to use social media to communicate with students, they need to register this with their Dean and the Marketing, Communications & Engagement Department. See Social Media Guidance for acceptable examples.

4.9. Care should be taken not to communicate in a way that implies a social or personal relationship rather than a professional one. There is a real problem if others in the cohort feeling excluded and, arising from that, perceptions of unfairness and accusations of bias.

4.10. Please refer to the University's Relationship Policy for further details about employee to student relationships.

Use of social media as a learning tool

4.11.   If employees wish to use social media in addition to University Channels to communicate with students, then they should do so with entire cohorts, not selectively. The communication channel should be set up for the relevant area, with the support of the Marketing, Communication and External Relations Department, not via an employee's personal social media account. If an entire cohort cannot be communicated with in this manner, for example some students not having access to social media accounts, then an alternative should be sought.

4.12.   Students are not required to be a user of any social media platforms nor to use social media for any aspect of being a student at the University, their studies nor their interactions with University employees.

4.13.   University Channels such as Microsoft Teams, Canvas or email must be used to communicate course information to students. Social media may only be used to impart course information in addition to the formal channels. Once a message or details have been posted on formal channels it can be shared using social media via University accounts. Personal social media accounts should not be used.

4.14.   Any direct communication between employees and students should be directed through Microsoft Teams or University email and not through social media.

5. Breach of this policy (Employee)

5.1. If an employee has concerns about how they, colleagues or students are being treated online they should speak to their line-manager.

5.2. If an employee sees social media content that breaches this policy, they should contact their line manager.

5.3. This policy will be invoked when the University is made aware of inappropriate use of social media or if these channels are being used to harass or harm others.

5.4. Breach of this policy by an employee may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Any disciplinary action will be taken in accordance with the Staff Disciplinary Procedures.

5.5. Disciplinary action may be taken regardless of whether the breach is committed during working hours and regardless of whether any University equipment or facilities are used in committing the breach.

5.6. Any staff or student suspected of committing a breach of this policy will be expected to co-operate with our investigation. In cases where criminal conduct is suspected or reported, the matter may be referred by the University to the police.

5.7. The University reserves the right to ensure the rules relating to employee activities using its IT resources are being complied with and such activities are for legitimate purposes.

5.8. Staff and students may be required to remove any social media content that the University considers to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in further disciplinary action.

6. Breach of this Policy (Student)

6.1. If a student has concerns about the misuse of social media that breaches this policy, or how you or fellow students or others are being treated online, please report this to an appropriate member of staff (for example personal tutor, Head of Department, Student Services, housing assistants) or the Student Union. Alternatively, a report can be made directly to the University's Complaints and Conduct team through Report + Support. Advice and guidance can be found on Report + Support.

6.2. The University takes complaints and concerns from students very seriously. There are formal and appropriate ways for students to raise complaints via the complaints procedures as set out in the Student Complaints Policy and the Disciplinary Procedures for Students.

6.3. Breach of this policy by a student may result in action under the Disciplinary Procedures for Students which can result in action up to and including expulsion from the University.

6.4. Any staff or student suspected of committing a breach of this policy will be expected to co-operate with our investigation. In cases where criminal conduct is suspected or reported, the matter may be referred by the University to the police.

6.5. Staff and students may be required to remove any social media content that the University considers to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in further disciplinary action.

7. Support

7.1. Staff can access additional toolkits and advice on the Marketing, Communications & Engagement intranet pages, including the accompanying Social Media Guidance.

7.2. Staff seeking support for their wellbeing can contact Care First Employee Assistance Programme any time day or night for confidential support with any issue. This service is confidential, free of charge and is available to all staff. Tel : 0800 174319. Staff can also reach out to HR via the Staff Wellbeing Officer.

7.3. Students seeking support may contact the Student Life Advice Team who can not only provide wellbeing support but also signpost the student to the relevant complaints procedure if the student wishes to pursue this. Students can also access impartial advice from the SU—the SU offices are found on level 2 of the King Alfred Centre

7.4. Students can access additional examples, advice and information on online bullying at stoponlinebullying.winchester.ac.uk and on Report + Support