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| **POLICY** |
| **Responsible Use of Social Media** |
| **Contact Officer** |
| *Director of Personnel* *Director of Communications & Participation**Senior Project Manager: Corporate Policies (Policy author)* |

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| **Purpose** |
| *The primary aims of this Policy are to promote the use of social media and to define parameters for managing the necessary risks that subsequently arise, particularly those that relate to the University’s reputation, or to legal and ethical issues.* *This Policy should also be read in conjunction particularly with the University’s ICT Regulations and with policies relating to bullying and harassment, whistleblowing and data protection.**Other information is available in relation to this area for learning and teaching use, professional use by staff and students and general toolkits and guidance.*  |
| **Overview** |
| 1. The University of Worcester is committed to making the best use of available technology and innovation to improve communications, interaction and other needs of staff, students and partners.
2. 'Social media' is the term commonly given to web-based tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests online. As the name implies, social media involves the building of online communities or networks to encourage participation and engagement.
3. For the purposes of this Policy, the term social media refers to any publicly accessible (but not University-owned) type of interactive online media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum. The term typically describes applications such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and other wikis, blogs, video and/or image sharing websites. It is impossible for the Policy to define an exhaustive list, largely due to constant and increasing fluidity of the media.
4. The University recognises the importance of utilising social media across a wide range of activities and therefore encourages employees to make best use of social media in relation, especially, to the following:
* learning and teaching
* marketing and brand-management
* applicant conversion
* communications with internal and external colleagues, students, members of partner organisations and members of professional bodies.
1. Employees are actively encouraged to contribute to the University's social media activities, for example by writing for UW-run blogs, managing a social media account and/or running official social communications.
2. Resources are available to help staff get started with, develop and innovate using a variety of social media tools and applications. Academic staff in particular are encouraged to consider, as a starting point, the ILS ‘SAM’ pages.[[1]](#footnote-1)
3. This Policy aims to ensure that employees are able to make best use of social media applications whilst maintaining a safe professional environment and protecting themselves, as well as the University.
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| **Scope** |
| *This policy applies to staff working at, or on behalf of, the University.* |
| **The Policy** |
| **Use for Marketing and Communications**1. Employees must be aware that, while contributing to the University's social media activities, they are representing the University. Staff intending to utilise social media for marketing purposes, or to manage relationships with applicants and students should discuss these plans with Communications and Participation in the first instance.
2. Staff who use social media should use the same safeguards and approval processes as they would with any other form of communication about the University in the public sphere. This process includes:
* making sure that the communication has a purpose and a benefit for the University;
* obtaining permission from their Line Manager;
* before embarking on a public campaign using social media, all existing channels should be considered before creating a new account. If a new channel is being considered, agreement from the Communications and Participation department must be obtained.
1. Any communications that employees make in a professional capacity through social media must not:
* breach confidentiality, for example by:
	+ - revealing confidential intellectual property or information owned by the University;
		- revealing confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or partner contact) or organisation (such as a partner institution) either directly or indirectly (ie. by providing information that allows individuals or organisations to be identified);
		- discussing the University's internal workings (such as negotiations or plans that are not public knowledge;
* do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or the bullying or harassment of, any individual or organisation, for example by:
	+ - posting images, videos, comments or links that could reasonably be regarded as discriminatory or offensive;
		- making offensive or derogatory comments, particularly those relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age or;
		- using social media to bully or harass (including sexually harass) another individual;
* bring the University into disrepute, for example by:
	+ - criticising or arguing with students, customers, colleagues, partners or competitors;
		- making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups;
* breach copyright, for example by:
	+ - using someone else's content without permission;
		- failing to give acknowledgement or citation where permission has been given to reproduce content.

**Use of social media in relation to recruitment of staff** 1. Unless it is in relation to finding candidates (for example, if an individual has put his/her details on social media websites such as LinkedIn for the purpose of attracting prospective employers), the Personnel department and recruiting managers should conduct searches on social media (or via online searches) only when these are directly relevant to the applicant's skills or claims that he/she has made in the recruitment process.

For instance:* a prospective employee might claim that they have used social media in previous roles (for example, as a publicity tool);
* a prospective employee's social media use may be directly relevant to a claim made in their application (for example, if they highlight a skill and reference their online presence as evidence).
1. Therefore, once the recruitment and selection process has begun the University will not undertake any systematic or routine checking of prospective employees' online social media presence. In line with Equal Opportunities legislation and ACAS guidance, the University acknowledges that conducting such searches during the selection process may lead to a presumption that an applicant's protected characteristics (for example, sexual orientation or religious beliefs) played a part in a recruitment decision.
2. Notwithstanding the above two paragraphs, and in line with the University’s approach to safeguarding[[2]](#footnote-2), the University reserves the right to investigate concerns that may arise regarding members of staff, or potential members of staff, using any appropriate medium. Such investigations may therefore appropriately include the use of social media or other online presence to confirm suitability of appointment (or otherwise). The outcomes of such investigations may, where appropriate, be drawn to the attention of the relevant authorities.

**Use of Social Media in Relation to Student Recruitment**1. Caution should be taken if using social media to assist with student selection and recruitment. In essence, the same principles apply as for staff, although it is recognised that some courses will necessarily and appropriately wish to use online resources, such as social media, to ascertain competencies and qualities of suitable candidates. However, care should be taken to ensure that inadvertent discrimination does not occur when, for example, it is impossible to access social media presence.
2. Similarly, specific care should be taken to ensure that the discovery of personal characteristics of applicants, through their online presence, does not unduly affect their opportunity to study at the University. Again, the risk here is one of disparity in the level of knowledge of all potential applicants as well as the potential of discriminating against a protected class.
3. As above, the University reserves the right to investigate concerns that may arise regarding students, or potential students, through means including social media or other online presence. This may include confirmation of admission to the University or to a particular programme. Such concerns may, following investigation, be drawn to the attention of of the relevant authorities

**Personal Use of Social media** 1. The University recognises that many employees make use of social media in a personal capacity both within and outside of normal working hours. The University further recognises the right of individuals to freedom of expression and to privacy. Nonetheless, it should be noted that these rights must be balanced with the business interests of the organisation, and even while they are not officially acting on behalf of the University employees must be aware that they can damage the University’s reputation, breach policies (eg. bullying and harassment) or breach confidentiality and/or Data Protection. This is especially the case where it can be determined that the individual is a member of the University and, further, if it is not clear that the individual is not communicating on behalf of the University.
2. Employees are therefore strongly advised to ensure that they do not contravene the points made earlier in the Policy (see paragraph 10) with regard to protecting the University’s reputation, even in a personal capacity. The University reserves the right to request that any online posting that is reasonably considered to have potential to cause damage to the University, whether that damage is reputational, financial or legal, is removed and that, where appropriate, a statement is produced to rectify such damage.
3. Above all, University staff are reminded that expectations of professional behaviour as articulated in a wide range of University policies, including the Safeguarding Policy, Dealing with Bullying and Harassment Policy and Data Protection Policy apply equally to online behaviour.
4. Consequently, employees should note that where this Policy is breached, even if the online activity takes place outside of working hours and away from University premises, disciplinary action up to and including dismissal may be taken.
5. The University recognises that employees may wish to use their own computers or mobile devices, such as laptops, tablets and mobile telephones, to access social media websites while they are at work – be this for work-related or personal use. Such use should be in accordance with the ICT Regulations and the IT Security Policy.

**Excessive use of social media at work**1. The University recognises that use of social media is increasingly part of everyday life. Employees are therefore allowed to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media websites for personal use from the University of Worcester's computers or devices.
2. Employees should however avoid spending an excessive amount of work time using social media websites and should ensure that use of social media does not interfere with their other duties. It is expected that departments or Line Managers establish specific policies or protocols regarding such use if they deem this appropriate.

**Monitoring use of social media during work time**1. The University reserves the right to monitor employees' internet usage in accordance with the [ICT](http://www.york.ac.uk/media/it-services/docs/policy/policies/InformationSecurityPolicy.pdf) Regulations. The University considers that valid reasons for checking an employee's internet usage include suspicions that the employee has:
* been spending an excessive amount of time using social media websites for non-work-related activity;
* acted in any way that constitutes a breach of this Policy.
1. The University’s normal disciplinary procedures will be enforced should evidence be obtained that either of the above cases has merit. The outcome of such processes, should the case be proven, includes provision for access to particular websites to be withdrawn.

**Disciplinary action over social media use**1. All employees are required to adhere to this Policy. Staff should be aware that use of social media in a way that contravenes the Policy, whether that is deemed deliberate or inadvertent may lead to disciplinary action. Serious breaches of these guidelines, for example incidents of bullying of colleagues or social media activity causing serious reputational damage to the University may constitute gross misconduct and may lead to action under the disciplinary procedures up to and including dismissal.

**Public Interest Disclosure**1. Where an employee releases information through social media that may be regarded as a Public Interest Disclosure (ie. whistleblowing), the University’s  [Disclosure and Whistleblowing Policy](http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/resources/policy/public_interest.htm) and procedures will be considered before any further action is taken.

**Review**1. The fast changing nature of information technology, particularly in relation to social media, means that this Policy will be reviewed on a biennial basis.
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| **Date Policy Approved** | *11 December 2013* |
| **Approval Authority** | *University Executive* |
| **Date of Commencement** | *1 January 2014* |
| **Amendment Dates** | *Version 1* |
| **Date for Next Review** | *December 2015* |
| **Links to Relevant Policies** | *Dealing with Bullying and Harassment Policy**ICT Regulations**IT Security Policy**Safeguarding Policy**Whistleblowing Policy* |
| **Policies Superseded by this Policy** | *None* |

1. <http://socialaccessiblemobile.wordpress.com/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy [↑](#footnote-ref-2)