UNIVERSITY of WORCESTER

Human Resources

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY: STAFF

This policy outlines how staff should use social media at work, or in a personal capacity where this impacts the University Group.

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1 Purpose

1.1 This policy has been compiled to help staff understand the reputational, legal and ethical implications of social media usage and what happens when it is misused, intentionally or otherwise. It seeks to protect the University Group and its staff from the misuse of social media and clarify where and how existing University Group policies and guidelines apply to social media.

The University Group wishes to promote a positive work and study culture for staff and students, both in person and online. The University Group is also committed to doing all that it reasonably can to secure freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law as it is one of the fundamental principles upon which the University Group is founded. The University Group is committed to ensuring that staff have freedom to question, and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves at risk. This is expanded upon in the University Group's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.

1.2 Nothing in this policy should be read as undermining or conflicting with the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech. In the event there is a conflict between this policy and the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech, the Code of Practice shall take precedence.

1.3 This document is not contractual and does not form part of terms and conditions of employment. The University Group reserves the right to amend this document as necessary to meet any changing requirements or where it is appropriate.

2 Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all staff of the University of Worcester, and associated companies, who engage in online conversations or share content in the context of a social network. This includes staff using social media in a personal capacity where this affects the University Group, its students, staff or the wider community.

2.2 This document should be read in conjunction with the University Group's IT Regulations.

2.3 The policy does not cover social media usage by students which is covered in a separate policy, nor does it apply to the use of social media in research which is encompassed by the process of ethical approval outlined in the Research Ethics Policy.

2.4 For the purposes of this policy, "staff" are defined as employees directly employed by the University of Worcester or its associated companies, workers, agency workers and self-employed contractors. This includes associate staff, visiting lecturers, emeritus professors and those in honorary positions.

3 Definitions

3.1 Social media refers to online platforms and applications that enable users to create and share content, as well as to interact and communicate with others. These platforms are continually evolving and the examples below represent a subset at the time of writing. New platforms will be released and others will change, merge or cease to operate. Currently the platforms generally comprise websites and apps and can host a variety of content, including messaging, hosting of files and materials such as text, photos, videos, and audio. Examples include Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok.

3.2 Through social media, individuals can connect with friends, colleagues, and people from the wider community, follow trends, join discussions including participation in global conversations. Social media can include messaging platforms that have restricted access to content such as WhatsApp and Snapchat.

4 General Principles when using Social Media

4.1 As stated in 1.1, the University Group is committed to promoting the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom within the law. It is important that staff exercise this freedom responsibly when using social media, as when staff post on social media it could be perceived that staff are speaking on behalf of the University Group, whether intended or not. All staff are required to show respect and tolerance towards the views, opinions and beliefs of others, even though those views, opinions or beliefs may be contrary to their own personal views, opinions or beliefs.

4.2 Staff must not use social media in a way that breaches any other University policies or its legal obligations. Staff should ensure that confidentiality is protected by:

- adhering to the data protection principles whenever personal information about other people, including photos or videos, are shared.
- not sharing University Group information that is confidential and/or not in the public domain.
- ensuring that intellectual property is protected.

4.3 Staff should consider whether the content of their social media post would breach other University Group policies if it was shared with colleagues in the workplace or another forum. If the post is likely to breach University Group policy, it should not be posted on social media. This includes posts that would be considered bullying and/or harassment, illegal, defamatory, against the Standards of Conduct or false or malicious remarks that may bring the University Group, its staff or students into disrepute. If such posts are posted on social media by employees, they will be investigated in line with the Disciplinary Policy. For workers, visiting lecturers, associate staff, self-employed contractors, agency workers or honorary/emeritus staff, where the Disciplinary Policy may not be applicable, other appropriate action will be taken, for example, the individual may not be offered any further work depending on the circumstances.

4.4 Social media, such as LinkedIn, may be used by the University Group when recruiting staff to attract and engage with candidates. Recruiting managers should ensure that any information seen on social media about a candidate does not influence their shortlisting or appointment decisions. Recruiting managers should not actively seek out information about a candidate on social media, however, if a recruiting manager becomes aware of information posted by a candidate on social media that raises concerns about their suitability for a role, they should contact a Recruitment Advisor or HR Business Partner for advice. This could be, for example, posts that are discriminatory. When considering such information, the University Group will ensure that it complies with its obligations relating to data protection, equality law and freedom of speech and academic freedom.

4.5 LinkedIn can be used in a professional capacity to build professional networks, promote conferences and for research activity. LinkedIn can also be used to attract prospective students to the University Group. Colleagues using LinkedIn for these purposes, must ensure that they follow the principles in this policy and any guidance issued by the Communications and External Affairs team.

4.6 Staff are personally responsible for their communications through social media. Staff should remember that what they publish may be readily available to the public (including the University Group, students, prospective students and the media) for a long time and can damage their own reputation, as well as those of their colleagues and the University Group as a whole.

4.7 Staff who have a social media presence which refers to the University Group, or from which the University Group can be identified, should ensure it is clear they are speaking in a personal capacity. Staff should not declare, imply or indicate that their content or views are representative of those of the University Group in such circumstances.

4.8 The presence of a disclaimer indicating that a staff member is speaking in a personal capacity will not necessarily mean that disciplinary action cannot be taken under the Disciplinary Policy. The University Group may request the removal of content if it is deemed to pose a risk to the University or to one of its staff or students.

4.9 In line with the University Group's IT Regulations, when using social media for personal purposes this should normally be outside of normal working hours.

4.10 The University Group prohibits the use of its logo(s) or shield as a social network profile picture, background images and cover photos, without the written permission of the Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC) Communications & External Affairs. It also prohibits the use of its name or derivatives thereof within the account name, or remit statement of a social network account, by individuals or organisations without the written permission of the PVC Communications & External Affairs.

4.11 Staff should not set up new University Group social media accounts; any requests for a new University Group social media site should be directed to Communications and External Affairs.

5 Use of Social Media between Staff and Students

5.1 Staff should use only a University Group email account, University Group telephone, University Group texting platform, University Group software and applications for communications with students and prospective students. Staff should avoid any personal messaging (such as WhatsApp or text messages from personal devices) or the use of any personal social media accounts when communicating with students and prospective students. Staff should not connect with students or prospective students on personal social media accounts and should not "like" or "follow" or comment on their personal posts.

5.2 There are instances where the use of shared social media by students and a member of staff (e.g. developing a LinkedIn presence) form part of course teaching, learning, research activity, work-based learning and assessment. In these instances, the use of social media for staff and students to communicate is permissible, including "likes" or "follows" which relate to a student's achievements. There may also be occasions when LinkedIn is used to engage with prospective students in accordance with Section 4.5 of this policy.

5.3 Whilst staff should not connect with students or prospective students on personal social media accounts, it is possible that staff may already be connected with an individual, before they enrol on a University Group course, as they may be already acquainted. If the member of staff has decision making powers in relation to the student, they should disclose the connection to their line manager so an assessment can be made on whether a conflict of interest is likely, and any steps that need to be taken regarding any conflict of interest and communication on social media. The line manager should seek advice from their Human Resources Business Partner.

5.4 Staff should not participate in closed social media groups that includes other staff or students.

6 Establishing Professional Boundaries on Social Media

6.1 To ensure a conducive environment for both staff and students, it is vital to use social media appropriately. By understanding the platform used and adhering to the University Group's standards of conduct, all colleagues can enjoy the benefits of social networking. Information and support on the professional use of social media is available on the Communications & External Affairs web pages.

6.2 Each social media platform has its unique features, privacy settings, and audience. Being knowledgeable about these aspects ensures that staff can make informed decisions about the content they post and who can view it. By understanding platform-specific nuances and guidelines, staff can harness the benefits of the platform, avoid potential pitfalls, and seek support when needed.

6.3 Staff are strongly advised to explore a platform's help or FAQ section for guidance and to regularly review privacy settings to maintain control of their digital footprint.

6.4 Guidance for staff:

a. **Understand privacy settings:** Stay updated with the privacy settings of various platforms and adjust them to fit the content and the desired audience.
b. **Be aware of the public nature of platforms:** Always remember that content shared on social media, even in private profiles or closed groups, can be accessed, shared, and archived by others. Private posts can become public and potentially be available indefinitely.
c. **Consider content:** Before posting any comment, image, or video, think about its appropriateness and whether you would be comfortable with students, colleagues or the outside public viewing it.
d. **Do not engage in inappropriate behaviour:** Any form of harassment or bullying via social media should be reported to the University.
e. **Do not share prohibited content:** Staff should refrain from sharing or endorsing inappropriate content, including but not limited to, pornography, offensive slurs, or materials promoting illegal activities.
f. **Manage disagreements effectively:** Approach disagreements with respect and diplomacy. If a conversation appears to be turning antagonistic, seek guidance or disengage politely.
g. **Protect your information and that of others:** Prioritise your safety, privacy, and the confidentiality of the University Group.
h. **Ensure you attribute opinions:** Especially when using personal accounts, it is often helpful to clearly separate what is a personal opinion from a stated position of the University Group. You must also be conscious how a University Group logo, brand, crest etc. is used in conjunction with what may be your own opinion.

7 Staff Wellbeing

7.1 When using social media, staff should ensure they take precautions to ensure their personal safety and protection from identity theft.

7.2 Social media posts can attract inappropriate or offensive comments from others, which can affect staff wellbeing. Staff are encouraged to access the support available from the University Group's employee assistance programme if they are affected by such comments. Staff should contact their line manager, if they are concerned about any comments that are inappropriate relating to their work at the University Group. If the comment is made on a University Group owned site, advice should be sought from Communications and External Affairs regarding the removal of the post.

7.3 It is not possible for the University Group to remove inappropriate comments from external sites. In these circumstances, staff can seek advice from Communications and External Affairs to ascertain if the site owner can be asked to remove the post. It is advisable for staff to disengage from such posts to avoid escalation.

8 Responsibilities

8.1 Staff should:

- Adhere to the requirements of this policy, ensuring that any social media posts are appropriate, non-discriminatory and do not bring the University Group into disrepute.
- Raise any issues of concern with their line manager, such as inappropriate posts.
- Look after their own wellbeing and seek support if needed.

8.2 Managers should:

- Ensure staff in their team are aware of the content of this policy and associated responsibilities.
- Provide appropriate support to staff in their team who have been impacted by comments on social media, including signposting to sources of support.

8.3 Human Resources will:

- Provide advice and guidance to staff on this policy as and when required.
- Ensure staff can access wellbeing support if they experience upsetting comments on social media.

8.4 Communications and External Affairs will:

- Provide advice and guidance to staff on the use of social media as and when required.

9 Further Advice and Guidance

9.1 Further advice or guidance on this policy can be sought from the HR Business Partner team.

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Related Policies, Procedures, Guidance, Forms or Templates	Regulations for the Use of IT Services and Resources Guidance on Digital Communications web pages Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech Bullying And Harassment Policy Prevention of Sexual Misconduct and Sexual Harassment Policy
Policy/Policies Superseded by this document	Responsible Use of Social Media Policy, 01 January 2014