

## Social Media Policy - Think Before You Write

### **1. Scope**

This policy applies to students' use of social media and digital communication platforms. It applies whether activity takes place on University systems or personal devices, on or off campus, and whether communication is public, private, directed to a group or sent to an individual. It does not apply to staff of the University.

Staff are directed to the University's Social Media Policy.

### **2. Introduction**

The University recognises that social media and digital communication platforms are a prevalent part of everyday life. These include, but are not limited to, Facebook, X/Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, Twitch, Reddit, Discord, WhatsApp, blogs, forums, livestreams and other messaging or content-sharing platforms.

For the purposes of this policy, social media includes any digital form of posting, messaging, sharing or publishing content, whether to the public, a private group or an individual.

Whilst the University recognises the entitlement of students to freedom of speech within the law, we are mindful of the potential risks and responsibilities associated with social media. Students should be able to express lawful views, including views that may be controversial or unpopular, while remaining responsible for conduct that breaches the law or University policies.

It is the responsibility of all students to ensure that their behaviour and language used on social media is appropriate and responsible.

Where a student wishes the University to investigate or resolve a complaint regarding the University or its staff, they are encouraged to use the complaints procedure on the website rather than relying on social media, particularly where confidential information or personal data may be involved.

Students are advised to familiarise themselves with the policy below.

### **3. Policy**

- 3.1 Think about your personal safety before posting. Don't reveal information about yourself that could result in identity theft, doxxing, harassment or unwanted contact. This includes data such as your date of birth, address, student ID, location, timetable or other information that could identify where you live, study or spend time. You should also consider your privacy settings and take care before posting images, videos or personal information about others.
- 3.2 Never give out any passwords or login information that could compromise your account.
- 3.3 Remember that whether you post on a blog, social networking site, livestream, forum, private group, direct message or any other form of social media, your post has the potential to be copied, screenshotted, forwarded or read by people beyond the audience you intended. Once something is online, it can be difficult or impossible to remove fully. Posts can be found years after publication, even after you think you have deleted them. Think before you write.
- 3.4 Ensure your tone is right and strike the right balance between informality and formality. Do not say anything online that you would not say in public.
- 3.5 Social media is not anonymous. As with everything on the internet, data can be retrieved and traced back to the original author. You should therefore be very careful in relation to any communication made on a social media, as you will be personally responsible for your communications.
- 3.6 You should be mindful of others' privacy and be careful not to share any information that could damage their reputation and as a consequence, the reputation of the University and the value of your degree.
- 3.7 Be aware that postings on social media may also reflect the University and students should be particularly careful not to damage its reputation and as a consequence, the value of your degree.
- 3.8 You should not express any view or opinion on behalf of the University unless expressly authorised to do so by the Communications Team at the Directorate for Institutional Advancement. Official University social media channels are managed centrally. Students should not create, use or present accounts in a way that suggests they are speaking on behalf of the University unless they have been authorised to do so.
- 3.9 The following are examples of content that is considered to be of an unacceptable nature and should never be posted:

- Inappropriate or discriminatory comments regarding the University. Comments should be expressed in a polite and well-mannered way that will not harm the reputation of the University
- Material that could be deemed to be threatening, harassing, discriminatory, illegal, obscene, defamatory, libellous or hostile towards any individual (including any other student or member of staff), group or entity (including the University and its associated entities including subsidiary companies)
- Discriminatory or hateful views or comments relating to protected characteristics, including sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief, age, pregnancy and maternity, or marriage and civil partnership
- Illegal/proscribed activities or organisations
- Content that infringes or violates someone else's rights
- Content of a violent extremist or terrorist nature or which incites people to commit acts of terrorism or violent extremism
- Content that could create a security risk for the University, its staff or students
- Any confidential information about the University and its associated entities including subsidiary companies
- Any commercially confidential information including that about or belonging to the University or its associated entities including subsidiary companies
- Business strategy, intellectual property or plans for innovation, including that about or belonging to the University or its associated entities including subsidiary companies
- Trade secrets including those belonging to the University or its associated entities including subsidiary companies
- Details of complaints
- Misleading or incorrect information
- The work of someone else without obtaining that person's permission;
- personal information about another individual, including contact information, without that person's express permission
- Spam
- Comments using fake accounts or using another person's name
- Anything which may bring the University or its associated entities including subsidiary companies into disrepute

#### **4. Misconduct**

4.1 Students whose use of social media is suspected by the University of constituting misconduct or a breach of a University policy may be subject to investigation or other action (including disciplinary action) by the University under relevant procedures.

4.2 Any student who is suspected of misconduct or a breach of a University policy will be required to co-operate with any investigation operated by the student services department under that policy, including providing relevant

information or evidence reasonably requested under that policy. Students will not be required to disclose personal passwords or login details.

- 4.3 The University may require you to remove any social media content that the University considers to constitute misconduct or a breach of a University policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in other action (including disciplinary action) by the University under relevant procedures.
- 4.4 Where the University is concerned that any conduct or communication could amount to an illegal activity, the University may report the matter to the police.

## **5. Reporting an Incident**

- 5.1 Where misconduct or a breach of a University policy is reported, the University will review the circumstances, including but not limited to the nature of the communication, the impact on others, whether evidence has been preserved, and how quickly the communication was removed following a request. The University will then decide on the most appropriate course of action.
- 5.2 If a student wishes to report an incident which has occurred on social media relating to staff, students or the University, they should refer to the complaints procedure which can be accessed on the University website. Where there is an immediate safety concern, harassment, threats, sexual misconduct or possible criminal activity, students should preserve relevant evidence where safe to do so and seek support through the appropriate University reporting, safeguarding or wellbeing route.
- 5.3 If a comment by a student is brought to the attention of a member of staff they should report it to student services department.

## **6. Related Policies and Procedures**

- 6.1 Social media should never be used in a way that breaches any of the University's policies, including but not limited to the following policies:
- Student Conduct and Discipline Policy
  - Data Protection Policy
  - Freedom of Information Policy
  - Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom Policy / Code of Practice
  - Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy and reporting procedures
  - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
  - Safeguarding Policy
  - Prevent Policy or Prevent Duty guidance
  
  - Report and Support / Student Support and Wellbeing procedures
  
  - Intellectual Property Policy

- Acceptable Use Policy
- Information Security Policy
- Complaints Procedure
- Student Disciplinary Procedure

To contact the Communications Team at the Directorate for Institutional Advancement please email [news@bolton.ac.uk](mailto:news@bolton.ac.uk)