

Student Social Media and Communications Policy

Purpose and Context

The University of Huddersfield is committed to promoting the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom so far as that is reasonably practicable within the law. The University also wishes to promote a positive working culture for staff and students, both in person and online.

This policy has been compiled to help students 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 students, the University and its staff from the misuse of social media and clarify where and how existing University policies and guidelines apply to social media. It includes the use of the chat function in conferencing software like Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc.

Scope

This policy applies to all students of the University of Huddersfield who engage in online conversations or share content in the context of a social network.

It extends to students' use of social media in a personal capacity, where this impacts the University, its students, staff or the wider community. Furthermore, it outlines the responsibilities of students who use social media associated with a University or Students' Union Club, Society or Group.

The policy does not cover social media usage by University staff, 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 and Integrity Policy.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The University recognises that social media is an important part of everyday life for many students; it can bring real benefits and is a valuable means of communication.
- 1.2 The use of such online resources has become a significant part of life for many people as a way of keeping in touch with friends and associates and can be used to exchange ideas and thoughts on common interests. However, the use of social media by students can also pose risks to the University's confidential information, reputation and overall compliance within the law.

2 Definitions

- 2.1 This policy adopts the definition provided by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR): “The term commonly given to internet and mobile-based channels and tools that allow users to interact with each other and share opinions and content. It involves the building of communities or networks and encouraging participation and engagement”
- 2.2 Social media channels covered by this policy include, but are not limited to, Facebook, X, TikTok, Snapchat, LinkedIn, YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram, Pinterest, Weibo, Youku, blogging platforms, online forums and review sites. It does not include the hosting and management of personal websites; the regulation of which is subject to both UK and International laws.
- 2.3 It also extends to the use of the chat function in any conferencing software, whether these are used in a scheduled teaching and learning session or for communication between students when collaborating at other times. The recording function in MS Teams means that the contents of a ‘chat’ remain available after the session has closed and form part of the enduring record.
- 2.4 Students may have two different types of social media presence; through a personal account used primarily for non-study purposes; and/or through a University account and/or Students’ Union Club, Society or Group.

3 Guidelines relating to the use of Social Media

- 3.1 Students who have a social media presence which refers to the University, or from which the University can be identified, should ensure it is clear they are speaking in a personal capacity. Students should not declare, imply or indicate that their content or views are representative of those of the University.
- 3.2 The presence of a disclaimer will not necessarily mean that disciplinary action cannot be taken. The University may request the removal of content if it is deemed to pose a risk to the reputation of the University or to that of one of its staff/students.
- 3.3 Individuals are personally responsible for their communications through social media. Remember that what you publish may be readily available to the public (including the University, prospective future employers, the media and social acquaintances) for a long time. Keep this in mind when posting content. Inappropriate posting of content can damage your career potential, since potential (and current) employers often screen social media sites when considering applications.
- 3.4 The University recognises and upholds the principles of academic freedom and free speech, however, respect should be shown at all times for other

people's privacy and feelings. Social media should not be used to abuse or intimidate staff, students or members of the public. Care should be taken to avoid language which may be deemed as offensive to others. For example, you should not:

- say defamatory things about people or organisations;
- say anything that goes beyond free speech within the law
- engage in any criminal activity;
- tell lies or mislead people; or
- post inappropriate pictures or videos.

- 3.5 Before posting pictures, videos or details of another person you should obtain their consent.
- 3.6 Students should not post communications which might be misconstrued in a way that could damage the University's goodwill and academic reputation, even indirectly.
- 3.7 The University prohibits using its logo(s) in on social network profile pictures, background images or cover photos, without the permission of the Director of Marketing and Communications. 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 permission of the Director of Marketing and Communications.
- 3.8 If you are approached by a media contact about content on a site relating to the University of Huddersfield you should contact the Director of Marketing and Communications before taking any action.
- 3.9 Official complaints made by students regarding social media usage should be made using the official complaints channels of either the University or the Students' Union, depending on the context of the complaint.

4 Compliance with related policies and agreements

- 4.1 Social media should never be used in a way that violates any other University policies or obligations relating to students. If your post would violate any of the University's policies in another forum, it will also violate them in an online forum.
- 4.2 Anybody is free to talk about the University on social media sites, however you must not share confidential information. The University has a duty to promote freedom of speech and recognises that an attitude of tolerance is essential to enable academic debate. All students and staff are required to show respect and tolerance towards the views, opinions and beliefs of others, even though those views, opinions or beliefs may run contrary to their own personal views, opinions or beliefs.

- 4.3 Therefore, in all cases where it is believed that this policy has been breached, considerable judgement will be exercised to consider the context behind the issue and the impact of the action, particularly when it impacts on the right to protest. However, please be aware that disparaging or untrue remarks which may bring the University, its staff or students into disrepute may constitute misconduct, and disciplinary action may be applied.
- 4.4 Please refer to the Students' Handbook of Regulations for further details; this policy does not vary the existing student disciplinary procedures.

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Freedom of Speech and External Speakers Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy
- IT Security Policy
- Intellectual Property Policy
- Students Handbook of Regulations and linked policies
- Constitution of the University of Huddersfield Students' Union By-law Nine.

POLICY SIGN-OFF AND OWNERSHIP DETAILS	
Document name:	Student Social Media and Communications Policy
Version Number:	V3
Equality Impact Assessment:	October 2018 (original) Reviewed May 2025
Privacy Impact Assessment:	05/06/25
Approved by:	UTLC
Date Approved:	May 2025
Date for Review:	May 2028
Consulted with (Departments / Area of Service / Job Title):	University Secretary
Author:	Director of Registry and Academic Development
Owner (if different from above):	Director of Registry and Academic Development
Document Location:	https://www.hud.ac.uk/media/policydocuments/Student-Social-Media-and-Communications-Policy.pdf
Compliance Checks:	Breaches of the Regulations handled under the Student disciplinary process
Related Policies/Procedures:	Social media policy for staff Freedom of Speech and External Speakers Policy

REVISION HISTORY			
Version	Date	Revision description/Summary of changes	Author
V3	May 2025	In conjunction with University Secretary, updated to take into account OfS concerns about the 'chilling effect' i.e. the potential for staff and students to self-censor and not speak about or express certain lawful views	Director of Registry and Academic Development
V2.2	May 2023	Explicit reference to principles of freedom of speech	Registry
V2.1	Aug 2020	To incorporate use of MS Teams	Registry
V2.0	Oct 2018	Significant redraft following consultation with Students Union and Marketing and Communications	Registry
V1.0	Sept 2015	First draft of new policy	Registry