SOCIAL MEDIA
POLICY

April 2023

OU Students Association Social Media Policy

Purpose of this policy

This policy has been created to support the values and vision of the Open University Students Association, providing both instruction and guidance around the use of social media and online platforms in respect of the Association.

All students of the Open University are bound by OU regulations, and when participating on social media should refer to the Open University's social media policy.

1. Social media

This term refers broadly to any online media or social applications which allow user participation, social interaction and exchange, publishing, and broadcasting. This includes, but is not restricted to, the following:

- social networking websites, such as Facebook and Discord.

- video and photo sharing websites, such as Flickr, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube.

- messaging services, such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and Snapchat.

- microblogging sites, such as Twitter.

- networking sites, whether personal or professional, such as LinkedIn.

- blogs, both corporate and personal, such as The Hoot.

- online collaboration tools, such as Slack.

2. Application

This policy is intended to support our Values and Behaviours Policy and to create a positive social media experience, with clear policies and guidelines to support **all** members, including current or extended student members, elected, selected, appointed volunteers and honorary members.

For clarification, this would include, but not be limited to, students taking part in online elections, attending online events such as the biennial Conference, online Freshers, or other activities, and engaging with The Hoot.

3. Conduct on social media

All students engaging using official Association spaces are expected to act in a manner which reflects our organisational values. Expectations of professional conduct from Association representatives and volunteers are the same on social media as in any other context and should not be viewed differently.

4. Working in any OU Students Association capacity

The OU Students Association encourages and supports social media activity to share news and spread information across all relevant platforms to effectively develop our strategic aims. When using social media in any of the capacities mentioned above (see 'Application'), volunteers and members should be mindful of any role they hold within the Association. The reputation of volunteers as representatives of the organisation means that individuals must be mindful that the views they share and the conduct they exhibit could be regarded as the views of the Association. An awareness of this responsibility is important, even when simply engaging student to student.

Therefore, it is important to be aware there is an expectation for volunteers to adhere to the Volunteer Policy and to:

- not advertise personal businesses or agendas in official Association spaces or take advantage of any official Student Association position to seek any personal benefit. For advice about advertising charitable events and fundraising please contact our Digital Communications Team.

- share our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, and to challenge and report discriminatory behaviour, harassment or online abuse.

- respect matters of privacy and confidentiality around Association and Open University information as appropriate.

- refer all media and press enquiries to the President and the Chief Executive.

5. Rules of engagement in social media spaces

- Act within our Values and Behaviour Policy, displaying our values of; Integrity, Openness, Equality and Inclusivity, Collaboration, Kindness and Compassion.

- Do not share personal data, and discourage others from doing so.

- Do not share personal details of tutors.

- If you see anything suspicious or inappropriate, please report the post/ comment using the 'Report to admins' function (where available).

For further advice or to report any other issues, contact ousa@open.ac.uk.

6. Unacceptable behaviour on social media

Examples of behaviour that will not be tolerated include:

- Cyberbullying, trolling, harassment, hate speech, posting or re-posting abuse, posting or re-posting offensive or defamatory images, or using offensive or defamatory language, the sharing of extremist views, posting or re-posting discriminatory material.

- posting or re-posting anything that may bring the Open University Students Association into disrepute or threaten the safety and wellbeing of any of its members or staff.

- posing as or allowing others to believe that you're running an official Association channel or misrepresenting the remit of your volunteer role.

7. Use of OU Students Association branding and the Association logo

You must only use Association branding on a specifically Association-related social media profile or any official Association social media space that has been intended for that purpose. This includes official Association national and regional social media spaces.

Graphics/images
Students and student volunteers should not create their own graphics using the Association logo. By distorting the Association logo and not adhering to our brand guidelines, this can undermine the professionalism of the Association. Existing branded content must also not be altered or edited.

Online spaces
Students must not create online spaces (blogs, Facebook pages and/or groups etc) under the Association's name unless authorised to do so. If the need/desire arises to create a new online space, the prospective creator of the space should contact the Digital Communications team in the first instance, so that they can receive support and proper authorisation (if granted) – meaning that this area can be added to the Association list of official online spaces.

An exception to this rule is the creation of an online space to support a Club's activity, in which case you should contact oustudents-clubs@open.ac.uk.

Spaces created without permission are unofficial and must be labelled as such.

Social accounts

It is expected that some communities within the Association will need to set up social accounts in order to facilitate their activities (e.g. Clubs). Volunteers may also want to refer to the Association in their bio or even account name. These spaces will require prior approval, and otherwise will be regarded as solely personal. Until permission is granted, these accounts must be labelled as 'unofficial' or not include the Association's name.

The Association should be made aware of these accounts in order to facilitate better support, and to encourage a network of accounts supporting one another. This will also allow Association staff to prompt account holders to update their individual profiles when necessary – for example, to reflect the fact that an individual has left their post once their term has ended, or to close a social account once a Club has ceased to exist.

Responsibility for social media content

The Association will be responsible for posts to authorised spaces, created for organisational/professional purposes, where these are made by individuals who work for, or are connected to, the Open University Students Association, by way of an agreement, contract (oral or written) or other mutually-agreeable arrangement. Where express authority has been granted for the space, the student(s) must adhere to the "Rules of Engagement" set out in this policy and work within our values.

The administrators assigned to these official spaces are responsible for monitoring compliance and liaising with the Head of Digital Communications in relation to any concerns.

Any unauthorised online spaces, where authority has not been expressly granted by the Head of Digital Communications, will be regarded as personal (for domestic purposes) and responsibility for all information, opinion, photographic, video or other content rests with the individual making the post. In these circumstances, the Association cannot and will not influence, develop, amend, control, guide or alter any content posted by a student, volunteer or anyone else who may represent the Association in whatever role that might be, where such data is processed for a domestic purpose.

If social media content which was originally generated by the Association/an Association official space is subsequently processed by another organisation, such as a society or any other associated group or individual for non-domestic purposes – wheresoever they may be located – that group or individual will be considered an independent data controller in their own right, and ultimately control that processing activity in accordance with data protection law. Such information and processing activities undertaken by that group or individual will not be governed by the Association's Social Media Policy.

Whilst individuals may use their own social media accounts to express their thinking on matters concerning the Association, those in senior positions, with influence over

matters of Association policy and/or governance, must not post information that may relate directly or indirectly to the Association on their personal social media accounts, as this could be regarded as organisational/professional and subject to data protection law.

Support
Please contact the Digital Communications team for advice at oustudents-media@open.ac.uk to ensure appropriate use of the Association branding and logo. Please note that you will be asked to remove any images that do not comply with the Association social media guidelines.

It's also worth noting that some support may be offered from the Community team when it comes to the promotion of certain events – particularly Society events.

8. Nations, Regional England and Association Community Facebook groups

All these Facebook groups should have standardised group rules, membership questions and closed membership as agreed by the Area Representatives, VP Community and VP Engagement.

Administrator rights for VP Community, VP Engagement, Area Representatives and their appointed student admins will expire in line with their elected terms, with new or re-elected representatives taking responsibilities in the succeeding term.

Nations and Regional England Facebook groups
These Facebook groups should be led and administered by the current elected Area Representatives, for example the Area Association Representative for Scotland should be given administrative rights for the OU Students Association Scotland group. Vice President Community and Vice President Engagement will have oversight and admin rights to all regional and nations Association Facebook groups, but will only take a more direct administrator role if asked to by the Area Representative. Otherwise, they will mainly act as silent admins, to provide support where necessary.

Area Representatives can ask local students from the appropriate areas to become admins of the Facebook groups (either the existing local admins or select new students) to support the day-to-day running of the group. It is the responsibility of the Area Representative to ensure their selected local admins play an active part in running the group. These admins must complete any training as required under the Students Association Volunteering Policy and may be asked to provide contact details to the Volunteering and Representation team.

If an Area Representative resigns from their role, control will revert to VP Community and VP Engagement, who may appoint local students to support with administering the group until a new Area Representative is elected.

Association Community Facebook group

This group should be led and administered by VP Community, with support from VP Engagement.

VP Community can ask students to become admins of the Facebook group (either the existing admins or select new students) to support the day-to-day running of the group. It is the responsibility of VP Community to ensure their selected admins play an active part in running the group. These admins must complete any training as required under the Students Association Volunteering Policy and may be asked to provide contact details to the Volunteering and Representation team.

If VP Community resigns from their role, control will revert to VP Engagement, who may appoint students to support with administering the group until a new VP Community is elected.

Other official Association social media spaces (including Clubs, Societies, and groups)

The Association Office must be notified of all official Facebook groups, and the contact details of administrators must be registered.

At this stage it must be clarified what the affiliation/relationship to the Association that the admin and Facebook Group has.

You may only use Association branded materials if you have been authorised to do so. Please contact the Digital Communications team for advice at oustudents-media@open.ac.uk who will help to ensure that Association logos in use are on brand. You will be asked to remove any images that do not comply. Some exceptions apply to Societies regarding branding, so please do enquire for clarification about this if this applies to your activities.

9.   Dealing with Unacceptable Behaviour

Should the Association become aware of conduct that may constitute any of the behaviour listed at section 6, or any other breach of this policy, it will investigate that conduct. While advice and guidance may be provided to an individual in the first instance, where bad behaviour is repeated the Complaints and Misconduct Procedure will be referred to. This procedure can be found at section 12 of the Association Byelaws, with sanctions listed at 12.2.18.

Association volunteers are expected to adhere to this policy as part of their role, having committed to the Volunteer Agreement and Policy at the point of application. Behaviour contravening the policy will be dealt with in accordance with our volunteer management process, and suspension from volunteering or permanent expulsion from the OU Students Association will be considered for the most serious breaches of this policy.

Where deemed necessary, inappropriate behaviour will be reported to The Open University to consider any appropriate actions or sanctions in accordance with their

own policy and conduct.

10. Related OU Students Association policies and documents

- [Forum Guidelines.](#)
- [Election Rules 2022](#).
- [Safeguarding Policy.](#)
- [Values and Behaviour Policy.](#)
- [Resolving and settling difference procedure.](#)
- For the **Volunteer Policy and Volunteer Agreement** please visit [oustudents.com/volunteer-zone](#). Please note that at the time of writing, you need to be logged in as a volunteer to access this page.

11. Review

Date approved by the Board of Trustees: 25 April 2023

Due for Renewal: April 2025

The Social Media Policy and Guidelines will be reviewed annually by the Head of Digital Communications and VP Engagement. Any major revisions to this policy will then be proposed by the Student Leadership Team and approved by the Board of Trustees.

OU Students Association social media: a quick guide

Using social media

- It is not mandatory to consistently be active on social media. Feel free to step away when in need of a break or when conversations become difficult.
- Deal with enquiries and questions when you can, but when you are unsure, signpost students to other areas, such as the office or the Association website.
- It is not mandatory to reply to students in unofficial or official social media spaces.
- It is important to keep yourself safe and be mindful of what personal information you share about yourself or others*.
- You are encouraged to support any communication plan in place for Association events. Members can help by retweeting or sharing messages originating from event organisers or the central account, ensuring that details are consistent and questions are directed back to the original source.

*There will be exceptional circumstances when sharing personal details is practical. For example, when working closely with others on face to face events apply common sense around sharing contact details.

Communicating effectively and safely on social media platforms

Take time to respond – think before you post.

- Is your response mindful, balanced, and positive?
- Does your response offer kindness and compassion?
- Does your response add anything of value to the conversation?
- Is your response respectful of the opinions and ideas of others?
- Could your post cause conflict or irritate a sensitive situation?
- Is a better option to take speak to the individual in a private area?
- Could you benefit from advice from colleagues before getting involved?
- If in doubt – do not post.

Establishing a Facebook group (including Clubs, Societies, groups, and any official group set up for the use of the Association)

- Ensure you have some experienced admins appointed.
- You may want to consider establishing the group with closed membership. This will help to protect members' privacy and create a safer space for discussion.
- When setting up membership requests, ensure you ask questions to establish whether someone is an OU student (e.g. What's your module code? Which

qualification are you studying towards? What other OU related Facebook group are you part of?).

- Consider post approval for members depending on the nature of the group.
- Consider whether you want to allow members to set up their own Facebook Messenger Rooms.