

OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY – DRAFT

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 which can be found here. [Link to OU policy here when revised policy is published.](#)

1. Purpose of this Policy

This policy provides both instruction and guidance around the use of social media in respect of the Open University Students Association.

2. Application

This policy refers to members of the Association as elected or appointed representatives, paid or unpaid Executive Committee members, all other volunteers, Honorary Life Members, Trustees, or other OU students whilst involved with or accessing Student Association services and using social media as part of their role or involvement with the Association, and when discussing matters relating to or affecting the Association.

For clarification, this would include but would not be limited to, for example students taking part in online elections, attending online events such as the biennial Conference, online Freshers and other activities and engaging with The Hoot. Members of Association Clubs, Groups and affiliated Societies are also covered within this policy.

3. Social Media

This term refers broadly to any online media or social applications which allows 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 sites such as WhatsApp, Messenger and SnapChat
- micro-blogging sites such as Twitter
- networking sites whether personal or professional such as LinkedIn
- forums and comment spaces on information-based websites, such as BBC Have Your Say
- blogs, including corporate and personal such as The Hoot
- forums and discussion boards such as Yahoo! Groups or Google Groups
- online wikis that allow collaborative information sharing such as Wikipedia.

4. Working in an OU Students Association capacity

The Association encourages and supports social media activity and the sharing of news and disseminating of information across all relevant platforms as an effective means of progressing our strategic aims. It is important to understand that when using social media in any of the capacities mentioned above (see application), members should be mindful of the

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position they hold within the Students Association, their reputation as representatives of the organisation and the knowledge that the views they share and conduct they exhibit will be regarded as the views of the Students Association. There is also the need to be aware that these responsibilities regarding positive behaviour are also present when engaging with other students simply as a student. With this in mind, all members should conduct themselves accordingly and in such a way that does not damage, disparage, or embarrass the organisation with behaviour that is in danger of bringing the Association into disrepute. Members should also be aware that when they are operating on social media in a personal capacity, their conduct is reflective of the Students Association and this should be considered.

5. Related OU Students Association Documents (to be hyperlinked when policy is published)

Volunteer Policy, Volunteer Agreement Bullying and Harassment Policy, CEC Code of Conduct, Board of Trustees Code of Conduct, 'OneTeam' Guiding Principles, Complaints and Misconduct policy, Forum Guidelines, Election Rules.

6. Use of OU Students Association Branding and Logo

You must only use Association branding on any personal, 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 should not create online spaces (blogs, Facebook pages, Facebook 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 adequate support, proper authorisation and so that this area can be added to the Association list of official online spaces. If a space is created with the Association in mind before going through this process it should be considered 'Unofficial' and its name should reflect this.

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. The Association should be made aware of these accounts in order to facilitate better support, encourage a network of accounts supporting one another and to allow us to prompt account holders to update their profiles to reflect the fact that they have left their post once their term has ended.

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Support

Please contact the Digital Communications team for advice at oustudents-media@open.ac.uk who will help to ensure that the materials are an appropriate use of the Association brand. Please note that you will be asked to remove images that do not comply with the above instructions.

7. Other Important rules

You should always seek to represent the Association in a positive way and avoid activity that is damaging or likely to bring the Association into disrepute. Members found in breach of this could be subject to sanction under the Complaints and Misconduct policy. This policy can be found in section 12 of the Association Byelaws with sanctions listed at 12.2.18. Permanent expulsion from the OU Students Association will be considered for the most serious breaches of this policy.

[Link to Byelaws here.](#)

Interaction between volunteers in social media spaces should always remain professional and members should avoid airing their differences or discussing their grievances in public. Please take these to another space where conversations of this nature might be had in private. Any particular concerns, including individual grievances or serious complaints about the Association or any associated individual, should be addressed under the complaints procedure and made in writing to ousa-complaints@open.ac.uk for the attention of the Deputy General Manager (Student and Staff Engagement).

You must not advertise personal businesses in official Association spaces, neither should you take advantage of your official Student Association position to seek any personal benefit. For advice about advertising charitable events and fundraising, please refer to the Finance Team in the first instance, who can be contacted at ousa-resources@open.ac.uk.

You are encouraged to support any communication plan in place for Association events. To this end, members should retweet or share messages originating from event organisers or the central account, ensuring that details are consistent and questions arising can be directed back to the original source.

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

All media and press enquiries must be referred to the President and the Chief Executive.

8. 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 including the Office or OU Students Association website etc.

It is not mandatory to reply to students in unofficial spaces.

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It is important to keep yourself safe and be mindful of what personal information you share about yourself or others.

9. Conduct on Social Media

Expectations of professional conduct from Association representatives, volunteers etc. are the same on social media as in any other context and should not be viewed differently.

To this end the usual rules of communication apply and should demonstrate the following:

Be reflective of our shared values of Integrity, Equality and Inclusivity, Openness and Collaboration.

Be reflective of our agreed 'One Team' Guiding Principles as stated here:

- Treat each other with courtesy and respect.
- Value and encourage each other's contributions, celebrate each other's successes and support each other through difficulties.
- Be tolerant of our differences and respectful of each other's rights.
- Promote a supportive environment that feels safe, accessible, welcoming and approachable.
- Be impartial, empathetic, kind, helpful, and sincere in our dealings with each other.
- Be positive, resourceful, creative, pro-active, and solution-oriented when faced with challenges.
- Proceed with integrity and seek to be professional in everything we do.
- Be open minded, welcoming new ideas and ways of working.
- Take time to build and nurture personal connections.
- Practise positive intent, seeking to identify the best in each other, working with a generosity of spirit.
- Practise active listening.
- Communicate regularly and in the most positive way.
- Make informed decisions that reflect good judgment.
- Address issues up front and welcome and manage healthy conflict.
- Identify problems and give them fair hearing.
- Conduct ourselves in ways that reflect positively on each other and the work of the Association.

10. Bad Behaviour on Social Media

Examples of behaviour that will not be tolerated include (but are not limited to) the following:

- 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 well-being of any of its members or staff.
- Posing as, or allowing others to believe that you're running an official Association channel

11. Dealing with Bad Behaviour

Should the Association become aware of conduct that may constitute any of the behaviour listed at section 10 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

Permanent expulsion from the OU Students Association will be considered for the most serious breaches of this policy.

Please see [Link to the Byelaws above](#).

12. 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 add anything of value to the conversation?

Is your response respectful of the opinions and ideas of others?

Are you mindful of how your post may affect others?

Could your post cause conflict or irritate a sensitive situation?

Is a better option to take a conversation away from the public platform and speak to the individual in a private area?

Could you benefit from advice from colleagues before getting involved?

If in doubt – do not press post.

13. Some Guidelines for establishing a Facebook Group (to include clubs, societies, groups and any official group set up for the use of the Association)

The Facebook group should be notified to the Association Office and contact details of Administrators registered.

You must state affiliation/relationship to the Association

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 images that do not comply.

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 Messenger Rooms.

Some rules of engagement in Facebook Groups

Refer to the 'One Team' Guiding Principles as a reminder of the culture we aim to inspire.

Display and encourage kindness; treat others how you would like to be treated.

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

Do not share personal details of tutors (including their names).

If you see anything suspicious or inappropriate, please report the post/ comment using the report to admins function.

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

Regional and Nations Association Facebook groups

These Facebook groups should be led and administered by the current elected Area Representatives, for example the AAR 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 and 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.

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.

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