

Policy on Social Networking Services

1. Introduction

The global availability and adoption of social networking services has brought opportunities to understand, engage and communicate with students, colleagues and the wider community in new ways and the University of Aberdeen recognises that these technologies can be used positively and effectively in a number of areas.

In order to support members of staff in using such services, this Policy has been developed to:

- encourage good practice
- protect the University, our staff and our students
- promote their effective use as part of our normal business activities

The Policy should be read in conjunction with the University's [*Conditions for Using IT Facilities*](#) and the [*Code of Practice for Electronic Publishing*](#).

2. Scope

"Social networking services" are typically web-based communication platforms which enable users to rapidly connect and communicate with other user(s), often instantaneously, in a variety of different formats e.g. via 'instant messaging' or blogging.

Social networking services include (but are not limited to):

- Blogs e.g. Blogger
- Online discussion forums e.g. Facebook
- Collaborative spaces e.g. Wetpaint
- Media sharing services e.g. YouTube
- 'Microblogging' applications e.g. Twitter
- Professional network spaces e.g. LinkedIn

Further advice on whether an application falls within the scope of the Policy is available from the Head of Service Management, IT Services.

It is essential that social networking services are used in an appropriate manner at all times. Therefore, the Policy applies to the use of the services in the following contexts:

- Personal sites (where postings make reference to the University or matters connected with an individual's employment with the University)
- Sites which are created to facilitate University business
- Sites hosted by third party organisations or individuals which are in connection with an individual's work at the University

Postings which refer to the University or matters connected with an individual's employment with the University, must comply with the Key Principles outlined in Section 3 (below).

3. Key Principles

The use of social networking services can have both legal and ethical implications for the University and members of staff. Therefore, the same norms of behaviour apply equally to personal contact and to postings on social network services.

Members of staff should consider the following key principles when utilising social networking services:

3.1 Appropriate Conduct

To ensure compliance with the UK legislative framework and the University's commitment to equality and diversity, all postings must comply with the norms of behaviour outlined in the *[Equality and Diversity Policy](#)* and the *[Staffing Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace](#)*.

Privacy and the feelings of others must be respected at all times and due regard to avoiding what may be viewed as offensive language should be taken. In particular, postings must not be derogatory or defamatory to the University, members of staff, students, third party contractors or our collaborative partners.

3.2 Information Security

Anything which is posted on a social networking service is essentially in the public domain. Once social media content has been created, it is very hard to delete as millions of digital copies can be made and transmitted instantaneously. Therefore, such postings are subject to copyright, data protection and Freedom of Information legislation in the same way as any other printed material would be. This applies equally to information which is shared through what may be considered 'private spaces' with security or other restricted settings in place.

Information which is considered confidential to the University must not be referred to on social networking services and permission should be obtained from individuals before posting their contact details or pictures on social networking services. Similarly, due care should be taken to ensure that any sites set up by members of University staff are not knowingly used for accessing or sharing illegal content. Care should be taken that appropriate virus and malware protection is in place in order to protect University network security.

Further information on the University's policies and legislative responsibilities in relation to data handling and Freedom of Information is available at www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/freedom-of-information-254.php.

Any enquiries received from the media in relation to social networking services or information which has been posted on such sites should be referred directly to the Head of School/Section before any response is provided. Heads of School/Section will seek appropriate advice from the Communications team or the Data Protection Officer (as appropriate) before responding.

3.3 Use of Sites in Personal Time

The University does not seek to restrict the use of social networking services beyond the reasonable level of personal use of IT facilities stated in Section 1.2 of the *[Conditions for Using IT Facilities](#)*.

Members of staff are reminded that effective precautions should be taken when utilising social networking services to ensure personal safety and to protect against identity theft.

3.4 Use of Sites for University Business

It is recognised that social networking sites can be of particular benefit to the University as a mechanism for advertising events (seminars, conferences etc.), for communicating with students (posting lecture notes, deadline reminders etc.) and for enabling alumni to keep in contact with the University. Social networking services can also be of significant benefit to the University in terms of promoting a positive image of the institution for student and staff recruitment purposes. However, it should be noted that not everyone will have access to such facilities and that appropriate arrangements for communicating with individuals in as wide a variety of media as possible should be made. It should also be noted that sites utilised by the University will be subject to monitoring and review to ensure that their content remains consistent with recognised good practice guidelines and the *Conditions for Using IT Facilities*.

Sites which are created for University purposes should be in line with the University's standard branding and corporate identity. Further information is available online at www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/corporate-guidelines-toolkits-238.php.

4. Breaches

Any alleged breaches of the Key Principles outlined in this Policy should be raised through the line management structure in the first instance. Concerns will be taken seriously and, where necessary, investigated promptly and confidentially in line with the University's Disciplinary Procedures for [staff](#) and [students](#).

If the content of postings on social networking services is deemed to have been in breach of the Key Principles, the University may require the closure of the application(s) or the removal of inappropriate content.

Approved by University Court, 26 June 2012

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Date published/approved	June 2012
Version	1. June 2012
Review date	May/June 2013
Audience	Staff and students
Related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conditions for using IT Facilities • Code of Practice for Electronic Publishing • Staffing Policy Against Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination in the Workplace • Equality and Diversity Policy
Subject/Description	This Policy has been developed to encourage good practice when using Social Networking services, to protect the University, our staff and our students, and to promote the effective use of Social media as part of our normal business activities
Equality Impact Assessment	-
Section	IT Services
Theme	IT, social networking, blogs, discussion, collaborative spaces, media sharing, Facebook, Blogger, Wetpaint, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, conduct, security, personal use, business use