Response to student consultation on Social Media Policy for OU students

Summary

This is a response by The Open University's Social Media Engagement Team to the consultation on *The Open University Student Computing Policy Appendix 3: Social Media Policy for OU Students* which took place between 22 February and 7 March 2017 on the University Students Consultative Forum. The summary of student feedback is at https://learn1.open.ac.uk/mod/forumng/view.php?id=13750 .

Student consultation said	Social Media Engagement Team response
The following sentence in the first bullet point of Section 3 is unclear: 'These accounts are monitored by University staff any student posts or comments triaged and responded to accordingly, and as soon as possible.' The word 'and' should be added as follows: 'These accounts are monitored by University staff and any student posts…' The word 'triaged' should be replaced by a clear alternative such as 'reviewed', 'examined' or 'investigated'. Also, there should be a brief explanation of the procedure underpinning this triaging activity.	The policy has been amended in line with your feedback.
The wording of the final sentence in the fourth bullet point of Section 3 should be changed from 'a students' association' to 'a student's association'	The policy has been amended in line with your feedback.
The following wording in the second bullet point of Section 4 needs to be revised: 'Should a social media profile reference the fact an individual is a student of the university, it is acknowledged that public-facing comments made by the account holder are their own and do not reflect those of the University.' The sentence and the context in which it appears do not make it sufficiently clear that the University does not expect students to specify that views expressed are their own.	The wording has been clarified in line with your feedback.
• The second sentence of the first bullet point of Section 5 should start with either 'It is..' or 'It's…'	The policy has been amended in line with your feedback.
References to 'this document' should be replaced by 'our social media policy.	The policy has been amended in line with your feedback.
There should be more clarity concerning of the responsibilities of the group administrators of 'unofficial' groups, with a question about how realistic it is to expect them to be held responsible for 'managing' the 'behaviours' in the groups, as suggested in the first	Managing behaviour could include having a policy for use and making that clear in the group and posting regular

bullet point of Section 5. An example cited is the posting by a student of their completed TMA for everyone to see at 1.00am: would the administrator be held responsible for this or would it be sufficient for them to have a code of conduct visible to all members explaining what is and is not acceptable?	reminders to adhere to the group's code of conduct. This is up to individual group owners.
There is a lack of clarity about the acceptability of sharing certain kinds of information on social media, such as module materials, advice, feedback on TMAs that have been marked, TMA scores, and the name of one's tutor. There should be a short section summarising what information it is or is not acceptable to share on social media, indicating where it would be appropriate for social media groups to decide for themselves what approach to take. Such a section would be very useful for group administrators. The guidance given may need to take into account the different types of platform and whether groups are 'open' or 'closed'.	This is covered in Section 4. Students can post about whatever they want as long as it isn't discriminatory, harassment, defamatory, breaching copyright or confidentiality. This applies to all groups, open or closed.
There are different student views about the extent to which the issue of plagiarism should be explicitly addressed in the social media policy, albeit as briefly as possible, or whether the proposed link to the Plagiarism Policy is sufficient. One option would be to give the link itself more prominence. The issue is a complex one, given differences of approach across subject areas, with some areas such as creative writing expecting ideas and work in progress to be shared, sometimes with marks allocated for this in assignments.	We have considered the views expressed and concluded that the link to the plagiarism policy in section 6 stating other social media related policies is sufficient.
The second bullet point in Section 3 states that 'The University monitors all public-facing references to The Open University in social media and will act upon any references or associations that could discredit the University.' It would be helpful to make it clearer what penalties the University will impose in these cases.	This will depend on the level of comment.
With regard to the list of other related OU policies in Section 6, if there are specific sections in the policies which are particularly relevant to the social media policy, it would be helpful if these could be identified.	We considered this suggestion but concluded that this may become complicated and confusing and in general the relevant policies should be considered as a whole. We have therefore not made this change.
Section 4 states that 'Students should not damage the reputation of the University while using social media…' but does not clarify sufficiently what would be seen as 'damage' and also whether it is acceptable to discuss negative, as well as positive, experiences. For example, it needs to be clear that being critical of a module is not 'defamatory'.	Section 4 has been amended to improve clarity.
It should be made clear in section 2 whether 'Online chat forums' include the OU's own VLE forums.	These are examples of channels, not an exclusive list, but it is intended that online chat forums would include those hosted on OU platforms.
It should be made clear whether 'our social media policy' applies to a student while on an approved study break.	We have added a line in Section 1 to cover this.
It would be useful to include a contact point if a student reading the policy has any further questions.	A contact point is included in the social media toolkit (which is linked to in section 8)

The revised social media policy, unlike the previous version, does not require 'unofficial' groups to be open rather than 'closed'. However, this is inferred rather than explicitly stated. It should be made clearer that the groups may be open or closed, in case readers think the previous policy still applies.	We have clarified in section 5 that groups can be open or closed.
Consideration should be given to whether there are social media policy implications of sites such as 'Rate my Professors'.	The social media policy, as part of the computing code of conduct, covers any public online space and it's not possible to list them all. Students are entitled to their opinions and can post but need to bear in mind the points raised in Section 4.
Amongst the related policies referenced in Section 6 is the Code of Practice for Student Discipline. Under SD 4.1 of the Code it constitutes misconduct for a student to use offensive language or to intimidate another student 'in a forum'. It is not clear whether this is intended to refer to the University's own forums and not those on social media. The Code makes no explicit reference to social media and so perhaps it should be revisited in the light of the growth in the use of social media.	This point has been referred to the part of the University responsible for this policy.
Effective communication of the social media policy to students is essential, for example a link on StudentHome and integration into student induction.	We are still considering how best to publicise the new policy.
There should be active encouragement for the policy to be made visible to students joining both 'official' and 'unofficial' groups, with group administrators asked to say that the group follows this policy in the group description, and have a copy in group files.	We agree in principle but this is hard to enforce. We will need to give further consideration to whether and how this suggestion can be implemented.
The date of the latest update of the policy should always be included.	Agreed.
Section 8 should encourage students to contact the University if they think any aspect of the policy is out of date, given how fast moving changes are in this area.	Contact details are included on the social media toolkit. And we will commit to reviewing the policy at least annually.
When the Social Media Toolkit is next updated it should include good practice guidance for OU staff on working with the administrators of 'unofficial' groups, informed by student input	Yes, it should. This will be covered by the imminent development of a social media strategy for the external engagement arm of the OU. Work will start on this in Summer 2017.
There should be a requirement for all 'official' OU forums to consistently employ the 'Like' button.	This suggestion has been referred to the relevant part of the University.

Date: **10th May 2017**