**Social Media guidance for students**

Social media – tools such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter - can be a good way for you to share your thoughts and questions about your University courses. Many courses will have a social media space (e.g. a Facebook group), some may be set up and administered by course organisers, class reps, or others. However, in these groups/spaces it is important to consider the following.

1. **Inclusivity.** If you are a class rep, it is a good idea to use the Virtual Learning Environment (e.g. Learn) or a group email to invite the entire class to join the group/be part of the discussion. Not everyone will want to or be able to use social media. It may be convenient to invite people based on pre-existing contacts but this can lead to persistent exclusion of some students.
2. **Conduct.** These spaces are only useful if they feel welcoming and safe to engage in, so you should always be mindful of maintaining the dignity and respect online that you would apply to any other whole class or group work interaction. The University’s code of student conduct applies at all times, including when you are using social media. <http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Discipline/StudentCodeofConduct.pdf>

To ensure that social media spaces feel safe and productive for discussion it is important to remain respectful to others, aiming to make your contributions constructive and positive. Think through what you want to say, and don’t make postings when you are particularly angry or upset. Sometimes taking a few minutes to step away, and then calmly read back over your post can help you to ensure you are happy with the tone of your comments, and that you would be happy to read/receive them.

If you are concerned at behaviour you encounter or witness then please raise the issue with the class rep or your personal tutor as appropriate.

**3) Privacy.** It is essential that you consider your own privacy and the privacy of others when engaging with social media. Behaving respectfully towards your colleagues and respecting both fellow students and staff privacy is one part of this, additionally you need to consider privacy of data and intellectual property, a crucial element of presenting yourself in an appropriate and professional way during your studies and as you prepare for the professional world.

You may work with a project team/research group during your time at University, particularly when carrying out your final year project. This might give you privileged access to intellectual property (the ideas and results of the group) that is not yet public, and may be commercially sensitive, and this should not be made available to others. Unpublished results, research plans and other confidential information must not be posted or discussed on social media without full consent. You must also make sure that you have copyright permission before you upload, share or re-share any file (image, video, podcast etc.), even on a closed Facebook group or “private” social media space. This also applies to course materials including lecture podcasts, slides and videos, as copyright and intellectual property rights reside with the University and performance rights reside with the lecturer.

1. **Academic Integrity**. Please do not share your assessed work. That includes not sharing your own assessed work on social media, nor asking others to share their work. Any sharing of work for assessment could constitute plagiarism and could have serious consequences (see plagiarism section).

**5)** **Authenticity.** It can be very useful to discuss course content with your classmates, and social media can be a useful tool to do that, but you always need to treat anything you learn from others with caution. Cross-check the accuracy of what others say using reliable sources or by talking to academic staff. There have been cases of incorrect information ‘spreading’ through social media and appearing in students’ assignments and answers in exams! This also applies to information about your course, like timings/locations of tutorials or assignment hand-in dates.

Your first port of call should always be your course handbook or the VLE (e.g. Learn). If you are unsure of a last minute change you can always contact academic or support staff directly. Information transferred by others to unofficial spaces, such as Facebook groups or on Twitter, may not always be accurate.

Remember that many courses will have a course discussion board where your lecturers can be on hand to help. Visit this when you have questions about your course. Their answers will be very relevant and will be there for everyone to see (including students who choose not to use social media).

Further information about managing your digital footprint (managing an effective online presence) can be found at: [www.ed.ac.uk/iad/digitalfootprint](http://www.ed.ac.uk/iad/digitalfootprint)

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