



Student Social Media Policy

1. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

Reaseheath College and University Centre Reaseheath (together referred to as Reaseheath College or the College) recognises that internet social media channels provide unique opportunities to participate in discussions and share information on topics of interest to students. Through social media activity and engagement on services such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, students can enrich learning and study, as well as personal lives and career opportunities. Reaseheath College also recognises the importance of social media when it comes to staying connected with friends from home, and from the College. There are many online groups and pages that you can join to stay connected. These include the official Reaseheath College Facebook page – www.facebook.com/reaseheathcollege and the Twitter feed – www.twitter.com/Reaseheath.

This policy is specifically for all Reaseheath College students (both Further and Higher Education and Apprentices) who are using (or considering using) social media in any capacity.

It has been compiled to help students understand the reputational, legal and ethical implications of engaging in online communication – and what can happen if social media is misused, whether intentionally or otherwise.

The policy offers advice and guidance to students on appropriate use of social media – and the potential consequences of misuse. It applies to all students of Reaseheath College.

2. DEFINITIONS AND CLARIFICATION

Bullying is defined, as unfair treatment, excessive criticism, or persistent nit-picking, intimidating, aggressive or undermining behaviour, which makes the recipient(s), feel upset, humiliated, threatened or vulnerable and undermines their self-confidence and integrity.

Cyberbullying is the use of the Internet and related technologies to harm or harass other people, in a deliberate, repeated, and hostile manner.

Harassment is unwanted conduct based on the grounds of religious belief, political opinion, sex (including gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status), race/ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or age, which has the purpose or effect of violating that person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person. Differences of attitude, background or culture and the misinterpretation of social signals can mean that what is perceived as harassment by one person may not seem so to another; nevertheless, this does not make it acceptable. It is the purpose or effect of the behaviour rather than the motive that must be considered.

Social Media refers to online channels of communication that allow users to interact in the public domain by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interest. It includes, but is not limited to, social networking services such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, wikis and blogs.

These examples are not exhaustive and these guidelines should be adhered to in relation to any social media usage. Students are reminded that it is not only students who use social media to communicate; many industry professionals and staff from the College use it too. Reaseheath College advises that students consider the privacy settings of their accounts at the beginning of term and make adjustments accordingly.

Any statement that is made online which could have a negative impact on a person's (or business's) reputation could lead to accusations of libel/defamation and lawsuits. This includes setting out to humiliate a person, even if only to a small audience. Under UK law, if a person is accused of libel/defamation, the burden of proof is on them to prove that their statements are accurate.

Although the College respects freedom of speech, comments that could be seen as damaging to its reputation, or that of a student or staff member, will be considered as misconduct and dealt with under the relevant disciplinary policy.

Students are advised that the College's Marketing Team routinely monitor use of all College branded websites and social media. Under the UK Government's Prevent Duty, all educational institutions are expected to ensure that College branded websites and/or social media are not used to promote extremist material or activities. The Student Association has been asked by the College to ensure that it also ensures that its websites and/or social media are not used to promote extremist material or activities.

Student safety is paramount, and this includes behaviour online.

3. PURPOSES & OBJECTIVES

This policy contains guidelines that set out how to make best use of social media sites without compromising your personal security, current/future career prospects and/or the reputation of Reaseheath College. Their objectives are:

- To provide a definition of social media and to articulate the potential risks it poses for students and the College;
- To define the responsibilities of individuals for the use of social media for College purposes;
- To highlight the potential risks of using social media for personal use;
- To raise awareness of relevant UK legislation and regulations, and College policies;
- To minimise the potential negative impact to the College because of social media use by students.

4. SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TEACHING AND LEARNING TOOL

Where social media is used as a teaching and learning tool through official College websites and accounts, all students must read, understand and agree to the terms of use of the social media website and the College's terms and conditions relating to the use of social media in this context before accessing and posting content on social media in a teaching and learning context.

5. SOCIAL MEDIA FOR PERSONAL USE

As a student, you should be aware of your association with and responsibilities to the College, and ensure that your profiles and related content are consistent with:

- the College's policies, including but not limited to, the Student Charter, Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Expression, Data Protection Policy and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (see section 15);
- your Registration Agreement with the College;
- how you would wish to present yourself – including to future employers.

You must also be aware of the potential impact and permanence of anything that you post online. Therefore, you should avoid posting anything online that:

- you would not wish to be in the public domain;
- you would not be willing to say personally to the face of another individual.

You should also be aware that any digital material that you post online could reach a wider audience than you would have expected or intended. Once digital content has been created and shared, you will have limited control over its permanence and audience.

6. EXPECTED STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOUR

Students are personally responsible for what they communicate on or through social media, they must adhere to the standards of behaviour set out in this policy, and any related policies (see section 15).

Communications on social media must be respectful at all times and in accordance with this policy. Use of social media must not infringe on the rights, or privacy of other students, or staff and students must not make ill-considered comments or judgments about other students, staff or third parties.

Students must take particular care when communications through social media can identify them as a student of Reaseheath College to members of staff, other students, or other individuals.

The following non-exhaustive list may, according to the circumstances, be considered to be of an unacceptable nature and should never be posted:

- confidential information (which may include research not yet in the public domain, information about fellow students or staff or personnel matters, non-public or not yet approved documents or information);

- details of complaints and/or legal proceedings/potential legal proceedings involving the College;
- personal information about another individual, including contact information, without their express permission;
- comments posted using fake accounts or using another person's name without their consent;
- material, including images, that is threatening, harassing, discriminatory, illegal, obscene, indecent, defamatory, or hostile towards any individual or entity;
- any other posting that constitutes a criminal offence;
- anything which may bring the College, or its validating partner, into disrepute or compromise the safety or reputation of colleagues, former colleagues, students, staff and those connected with the College. The College has well-established ways for students to raise any dissatisfaction or concerns that they may have such as the Student Charter, Complaints Monitoring Procedure (FE), HE Students Complaints Policy and Learner Harassment and Bullying Policy and Procedure. Concerns must be raised through such procedures, not on social media.

7. CYBER BULLYING VIA SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

The College will not accept any form of bullying or harassment by or of members of College staff or students.

The following examples illustrate the types of behaviour, displayed through social media communications, which the College considers forms of cyber bullying:

- maliciously spreading rumours, lies or gossip;
- intimidating or aggressive behaviour;
- offensive or threatening comments or content;
- posting comments/photos etc. deliberately mocking an individual with the intent to harass or humiliate them.

Cyber bullying may also take place via other means of electronic communication such as email, text or instant messaging. Any student who is experiencing cyber bullying by another student or a member of College staff, will have the full support of the College. The Learner Harassment and Bullying Policy and Procedure outlines the procedure to be followed, if a student feels they are being bullied, harassed or victimised.

8. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

All students must ensure that they have permission to share any third party materials, including all images, photographs, text and videos, before uploading them to or linking to them via social media and, where sharing is permitted, should ensure that such materials or shared links are credited appropriately.

In addition, all students must check the terms and conditions of a social media account and/or website before uploading material to it; by posting material to social media accounts and/or websites, you may be releasing ownership rights and control of the content. For this reason, you must exercise caution in sharing all information.

The College is not responsible for, nor does it hold any ownership, of any content posted by its students, other than content posted by students using College accounts, or in the course of their duties, as a form of professional communication.

9. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All students are responsible for:

- ensuring that any use of social media is carried out in line with this and other relevant policies;
- informing the relevant staff member(s) when an institutional account is to be used;
- seeking relevant authorisation for official posts prior to publication;
- regularly monitoring, updating and managing content he/she has posted;
- adding an appropriate disclaimer to personal accounts when the institution is named (see section 4 above); and
- reporting any incidents or concerns in line with section 12 below.

10. MONITORING

The College reserves the right to monitor, intercept and review within the law, without further notice, student activities using its IT resources and communications systems, including but not limited to social media postings, to ensure that its rules are being complied with and such activities are for legitimate purposes. The use of social media may be monitored by the College in accordance with its Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Expression and Data Protection Policy.

11. DATA PROTECTION ACT 2018 AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

The Data Protection Act 2018 (“DPA”) applies to social media as it does in other contexts. You must ensure that all posts comply with the DPA and the College’s Data Protection Policy.

No personal information, including photographs and videos, should be shared on social media without the consent of the individual to whom it relates. Students should, therefore, never post other students’ and/or staff and/or a third party’s personal information without their consent.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 may apply to posts and content that you have uploaded to official College websites, or any other website belonging to a public authority. As such, if a request for such information is received by the College (or other public authority), the content that you have posted may be disclosed.

12. INCIDENTS AND RESPONSE

Where a breach of this policy is reported, the College will review the circumstances and decide on the most appropriate and proportionate course of action, which may include referring the matter to be dealt with under a different procedure.

Where students are in receipt of any content considered to be in breach of this policy, this should be reported to the College via their department/curriculum area, or Student Services.

13. CONSEQUENCES OF A BREACH OF THIS POLICY

Any breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including exclusion/termination of registration.

Any disciplinary action will be taken in accordance with the procedures outlined in Complaints Monitoring Procedure (FE) and HE Students Complaints Policy.

Disciplinary action may be taken regardless of when the breach is committed and regardless of whether any College equipment or facilities are used in committing the breach.

Where conduct may be an illegal criminal offence, the College may report the matter to the police. Beyond that, a member of staff, student or third party may pursue legal action against you, if they choose to do so.

14. REPORTING

Any complaints received under this policy will be reported, on an anonymised basis where appropriate, to the relevant body within the College.

The policy does not sit in isolation and students need to be aware that a number of other relevant policies and guidelines exist which are relevant to conduct while using social media. Students need to be aware of and abide by all relevant policies and guidelines during their time at Reaseheath College.

15. RELEVANT LEGISLATION & COLLEGE POLICIES

This policy seeks compliance with the following legislation:

- Data Protection Act (2018)
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- The Telecommunications (Lawful Business Practice) (Interception of Communications) Regulations 2000
- Communications Act 2003
- Computer Misuse Act 1990
- Copyright, Design and Patents Act 1988
- Copyright (Computer Programs) Regulations 1992
- The Terrorism Act 2000
- The Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001
- Official Secrets Acts 1911-1989
- Obscene Publications Act 1994
- Malicious Communications (NI) Order 1988
- Electronic Communications Act 2000

The following College policies are relevant to this policy:

- Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Expression
- Learner Harassment and Bullying Policy and Procedure
- Safeguarding Adults Policy
- Young Person Safeguarding Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Student Charter
- Compliments and Complaints Procedure (FE)
- HE Students Complaints Policy

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