



UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

SOCIAL AND ONLINE MEDIA USE POLICY

(UL STAFF AND STUDENTS)

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1 Introduction

At University of Limerick (UL or University), we recognise that social media is an increasingly important and influential communication channel enabling debate and communication involving the expression of opinions, the sharing of links, images, data and other information.

In addition, online and virtual learning is now an integral part of the education ecosystem in Ireland and there is a permeability between the digital platforms used for this internally in UL and externally facing social media as content can be shared from one to the other, either deliberately or unintentionally.

University of Limerick supports the ethos of collective and individual responsibility in relation to good governance, transparency, and dignity in the workplace. If an individual staff member has a concern in any of these areas, or with any other workplace behaviour or practice they should talk in confidence to their line-manager / Dean or Division Head / Director of Human Resources. Alternatively, please consult *UL'S Protected Disclosures Policy & Procedures* on the [UL Policy Hub](#) for guidelines about how and to whom a disclosure may be made in confidence within the University or to specified external bodies.

This Policy must be read in conjunction with University policies, procedures and statutes listed in Section 4.

1.1 Purpose

This Policy is designed to:

- Support the principle that all members of the campus community will treat each other with dignity and respect.
- Provide clarity to all staff and students about the responsible use of social and online media tools in developing their personal and professional profiles and reputations in so far as this use pertains or may be perceived to pertain to University of Limerick.
- Sets out the process to be followed by UL should a formal complaint be made against a staff member or student.
- To support effective and innovative use of social and online media as part of the University's activities, while minimising the risks, which can impact on the wellbeing of students and staff and the reputation of the University.
- This Policy also provides clarity on expected standards of behaviour on social and online media where an individual is identifiable as a UL staff member or student.
- Create the potential for UL to take action against a staff or student on foot of a complaint or if the nominated Persons of Responsibility in UL decide action is necessary in relation to specific content.

- Allow for the flexibility for UL not to take action in response to a complaint about specific social media content.

1.2 Scope

1.2.1 To whom does the Policy apply?

This Policy applies to all University of Limerick staff, students and/or external parties (each of which is defined below and are, hereinafter, collectively referred to as Users) and governs the use of social and online media sites and the use of UL Information and IT assets authorised by UL for Users.

1.2.2 Definitions:

- a) Staff means all full-time and part-time employees of the University and its subsidiary companies.
- b) Student means all full-time and part-time students of the University.
- c) External Parties means all University contractors, researchers, visitors and/or any other parties who are granted access to the University's IT Resources and/or University social media sites/discussion forums on third party platforms.
- d) Social media is the collective term referring to social and professional content sharing platforms and networking sites.
- e) Online media is the collective term for internal teaching, resource, networking and communication sites.

1.2.3 In what situations does the Policy apply?

The Policy applies to all material posted or communicated online and on social media by Users where there is potential impact on the University

Whilst academic freedom / freedom of expression will be fully respected, this requires the responsible and legal use of social and online media by Users.

1.2.4 Responsibilities and Rights of Users on Social and Online Media

Users should follow the same standards of appropriate behaviour online as they would in person when using professional, personal and/or institutional social media accounts. The same laws, professional expectations and guidelines for interacting with staff, students, alumni, donors, media and other university constituents apply online as in person.

Do not post:

- confidential information;
- personal data or images without the owner's consent;
- intellectual property without the permission of the copyright holder.

University of Limerick is committed to the development and maintenance of a positive working environment, in which all staff and students have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. The right to be treated with dignity and respect also extends to the behaviour of staff and students towards each other on social media.

1.2.5 Who is responsible for ensuring that the Policy is implemented and monitored?

The implementation of this Policy is the responsibility of the Director of Human Resources and [The Office of the University Advocate](#).

2 Context

2.1 Legal and Regulatory Context

The Defamation Act 2009

The Defamation Act 2009 ("the Act") endeavours to balance the right of the individual to their good name with the notion of freedom of speech. The tort of defamation involves publication of a defamatory statement, defined as one *"that tends to injure a person's reputation in the eyes of reasonable members of society"*.

2.2 Legislation relevant to Social and Online Media and Internet Usage

There are several legislative measures which are relevant to online conduct and use of social media and the internet, including but not limited to the current and in-use versions of the following:

- Data Protection Acts
- General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- The Child Trafficking and Pornography Acts
- Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act
- Employment Equality Acts
- University's Act 1997: Academic Freedom
- Copyright and Related Rights Act
- Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act

2.3 Other Context

University of Limerick Policies

Users must adhere to the University policies in force at the time. Particular attention must be paid to the documents list in Section 4.

3 Policy Statements

3.1 Code of Practice for the use of Social and Online Media

Users must at all times use social and online media sites in a responsible manner, having due regard to the rights and reputation of the University and of others. Use common sense and courtesy. Be aware that material may be shared from internal online teaching and communications sites without your knowledge, so whether you are using internal resources or external social media, you are required to comply with the following rules:

- a) Users are personally responsible for what they post or publish online. If a User's personal or professional use of online and social media is found to be derogatory, discriminatory, bullying, threatening, defamatory, offensive, harassing, creating legal liability for the University, bringing the University into disrepute, breaching the Dignity and Respect policy or any other University policy or procedure then the University may take action as outlined in Section 3.3. This may include comments, videos, or photographs, which have been posted online about the University, students, work colleagues or managers.
- b) Users must comply with data protection requirements when posting colleague or student details online.
- c) Users must maintain an awareness of their association with University of Limerick when using online and social media either in their position as an employee of University of Limerick or in a private capacity.
- d) Where you identify yourself as an UL employee, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you would present yourself with colleagues and clients. It should be made clear that the views and comments expressed are personal and do not represent the views of the University.
- e) Employees should never represent themselves or the University in a false or misleading way. All statements must be true and not deliberately misleading; all claims must be substantiated.
- f) The chat function on internal communications platforms must be used with due regard to the University's policies and procedures and dignity, respect and behaviour in the workplace; see Section 4. This applies where comments are attributable or posted anonymously.

- g) Do not post confidential or proprietary information about University of Limerick, its students, employees or alumni.
- h) Care should be taken to use good ethical judgment and to ensure that all University privacy and confidentiality policies are adhered to. Users who share confidential information do so at the risk of disciplinary action.
- i) Staff should seek guidance from their manager before participating in social media discussions where they are identifiable as a member of the UL community and when the topic being discussed may be considered sensitive to the University (e.g. a crisis situation, intellectual property, issues which may impact on the University's reputation, commercially sensitive material).
- j) Online and social media sites may be referred to when investigating possible misconduct/gross misconduct as aligned with section 2.2 and 2.3 of this policy.
- k) The University may require Users to remove social media postings, which are deemed to constitute a breach of these standards, bearing in mind that once something is published on social media, it is in the public domain. Failure to comply with such a request may, in itself, result in disciplinary action.

3.2 Guidelines for the use of Social and Online Media

In addition to the above rules, there are a number of key guiding principles that Users should note when using social media tools:

- a) Always remember online content is never completely private. Social media users should regularly review their privacy settings on social media platforms to ensure they provide sufficient personal protection and limit access by others, where that is required.
- b) Access to online and social media accounts should always be kept secure.
- c) Critically evaluate all online information with caution as there is no quality control process on the internet and a considerable amount of information may be inaccurate or misleading.
- d) At all times respect copyright and intellectual property rights of information encountered on the internet. This may require obtaining appropriate permission to make use of information.
- e) Every laptop and smartphone has a camera and microphone. Behave as though every microphone and camera is on and potentially transmitting to the world unless absolutely sure otherwise.
- f) Once in the public domain, content cannot be fully retracted. Therefore, always take time to review content in an objective manner before uploading. If in doubt, ask someone to review it for you. Think through the consequences of what you say and what could happen if one of your colleagues had to defend your comments to a third party.

3.3 Notice and Take-Down

UL operates a “notice and take-down” policy for UL operated social media. Users must at all times use social media sites in a responsible manner having due regard to the rights and reputation of the university and others. If an individual has any complaints or objections to material content or postings to a UL social media account that is thought to contravene the UL social media policy, notice must be sent to marketingcomms@ul.ie to have the content reviewed. The Director of Marketing Communications and Public Affairs or their nominee will then make an initial assessment of the complaint for the purpose of verifying the complaint and determining the most appropriate course of action. If it is determined that the content does not contravene the policy, it will be left in place. If it is determined that the posting may contravene the policy, it will be brought to the attention of the Director of Human Resources if the complaint relates to a UL staff member or the attention of the Provost if the complaint relates to a student.

3.4 Breaches of Social Media Policy

The University may take appropriate action against individuals when an allegation of a breach has been made. Any actions taken by the University with respect to UL staff and students will be initiated in accordance with the appropriate UL regulations and disciplinary procedures, which may include, but are not restricted to, any of the following:

- 1) To disable any user and block access for that user to the University’s network, systems, communications devices or equipment.
- 2) The initiation of steps for implementation of the University’s *Statute No. 4: Statute on Disciplinary Matters, Suspension, Termination and Capacity* for staff
- 3) The initiation of steps for implementation of the University disciplinary procedures for students.

In the event that content is deemed to be potentially illegal, the University will report such content to the appropriate authorities.

3.5 Malicious / Vexatious Complaints

If a complaint is found to be malicious / vexatious then appropriate disciplinary action up to and including dismissal may be imposed, in line with Statute No. 4 on Employee Disciplinary Matters and Termination of Employment for staff and the processes outlined by the UL Discipline Committee for students.

4 Related Documents

This Policy must also be read in conjunction with all relevant University's policies and procedures, including, but not limited to:

- *Statute No. 4 on Employee Disciplinary Matters and Termination of Employment*
- *Discipline Committee for students*
- *Acceptable Behaviour in the Workplace Policy*
- *Code of Conduct for Employees*
- *Policy and Procedures for Workplace Dignity and Respect*
- *Grievance Policy*
- *Procedure for Managing Allegations of Misconduct in Research*
- *Research Integrity Policy*
- *Acceptable Usage Policy*
- *Data Protection Policy*
- *IT Security Policy*
- *The Code of Conduct for students in the Handbook of Academic Regulations*

All Policies and the *Handbook of Academic Regulations* may all be found on the [UL Policy Hub](#).