

Human Resources Policy Statement

Social Media Policy

June 2016

Introduction

Middlesex University is a diverse and forward thinking university with ambitious plans; this involves embracing new technology and improving the way that we communicate to our students, staff and the communities that we work with.

One aim of the strategic plan is to 'build and protect our reputation'; social media plays a key role in the achievement of this aim. It is recognised that staff not only use social media as part of their role at Middlesex University but that it is also used to connect with people/organisations outside of the work place, for personal and for professional reasons.

However, the practical application of social media is continually developing and this brings with it a number of potential issues to consider, both as individuals and employees of the university.

This policy is aimed at giving staff that use social media the appropriate guidance on the acceptable use of social media in relation to the workplace.

This policy explains:

- The acceptable use of social media in the workplace, at home and in your personal time
- How you can best protect the university and its community through your use of social media
- The potential outcomes of unacceptable use of social media

Background

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies and guidelines:

- Computer Use Policy for Staff (HRPS36)
- The Code of Conduct
- Visual Identity Guidelines
- Data Protection Policy
- Copyright guidelines published on the intranet
- Promoting a Positive Work Environment

Who is covered by this policy

‘Staff’ for the purposes of this policy shall be defined as:

All individuals working at all levels and grades, including senior managers, employees, consultants, contractors, trainees, homeworkers, part-time and fixed-term employees, casual and agency staff and volunteers (collectively referred to as staff in this policy).

Definition of social media

‘Social Media’ is the term commonly given to web-based tools which allow users to interact with each other in some way – by sharing information, opinions, knowledge and interests online. Social Media involves the building of online communities or networks to encourage participation and engagement.

The widespread availability of social media means it is important to understand how to use it effectively and sensibly, both in the workplace and during personal use.

The aims of this policy are to inform staff on how they can best protect the university and its community through their use of social media and help staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as blogs, wikis, social networking websites, podcasts, forums, message boards, or comments on web-articles, such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, SMS text messaging etc.

This policy aims to ensure that Middlesex University and its subsidiaries are not exposed to legal, ethical and governance risks through the use of social media and that their reputations are not adversely affected.

Acceptable use of social media

Use of social media at work and in your own time

Staff are allowed to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media websites from Middlesex University's computers or devices.

The university understands that employees may also wish to use their own computers or devices, such as laptops and palm-top and hand-held devices, to access social media websites while they are at work.

Employees should not spend an excessive amount of time while at work using social media websites and should ensure that social media use does not interfere with their duties except where it is a recognised part of their role. As a guide, social media should only be used for personal purposes whilst at work during the lunch break.

The lines between public and private can become blurred when using social media, therefore, you must assume that everything you write is permanent and can be viewed by anyone at any time and that everything can be traced back to you personally as well as to your colleagues, the university and its customers, partners and suppliers.

Use of social media for work purposes

Proposals to use any social media applications as part of a role at Middlesex must be approved by the relevant Head of Service or Dean. Staff should be aware at all times that, while contributing to the organisation's social media activities, they are representing Middlesex University.

The following terms should be adhered to at all times, including during periods of leave.

Staff should ensure that any published content is:

- respectful
- purposeful and a benefit to Middlesex University
- in-line with departmental and/or Brand guidelines and/or management instructions
- not considered unacceptable in line with guidelines under 'unacceptable use of social media' (see below)
- in line with copyright guidelines

All Middlesex University maintained social media accounts remain the property of Middlesex University and on no account should the contents thereof be copied or downloaded without the permission of the Director of Service/Dean responsible for the department's social media activities.

Unacceptable use of social media for work and personal purposes

Any communications that employees make in a professional or personal capacity, within or outside of work time, through social media must not:

- breach confidentiality, for example by:
 - revealing confidential intellectual property or information owned by the university or;
 - giving away confidential information about an individual (such as a colleague or partner contact) or organisation (such as a partner institution); or
 - discussing the university's internal workings (such as agreements that it is reaching with partner institutions/customers or its future business plans that have not been communicated to the public) or;
- do anything that could be considered discriminatory against, or bullying or harassment of, any individual, for example by:
 - making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race (including nationality), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief or age or;
 - using social media to bully another individual (e.g. such as university staff); or
 - posting images that are discriminatory or offensive or links to such content or;
- bring the university into disrepute, for example by:
 - criticising or arguing with students, customers, colleagues, partners or competitors or;
 - making defamatory comments about individuals or other organisations or groups; or
 - posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content or;
 - compromise the university's brand and reputation or;
 - use the university to endorse or promote any product, opinion or political cause
- breach copyright, for example by:
 - using someone else's images or written content without permission; or
 - failing to give acknowledgement where permission has been given to reproduce something.

Middlesex University believes that when taking part in social media you should follow the university's code of conduct.

Staff should ensure that when expressing a belief or opinion through use of social media, where their identity is connected to the university, that it is made clear that it is their belief or opinion and not that of Middlesex University.

Recruitment

There should be no systematic or routine checking of prospective employee's online social media activities (except where websites are cited in support of a job application), as conducting these searches during the selection process might lead to a presumption that an applicant's protected characteristics (e.g. sexual orientation or religious beliefs) played a part in a recruitment decision.

Monitoring

The university's Computer and Communications Systems Service (CCSS) reserve the right to restrict websites and monitor usage in-line with the Computer Use Policy.

Public Interest Disclosure ('whistleblowing')

Where an employee releases information through Social Media that may be considered as a Public Interest Disclosure (Whistle Blowing'), the university's Public Interest Disclosure Policy, must be initiated in the first instance before any further action is taken.

Disciplinary action over social media use

Any content that is published which has the potential to cause damage to the university's reputation or its employees and/or expose you and the university to civil or criminal liability (see Computer Use Policy) may lead to disciplinary action.

Staff will be asked to remove this content where it has reasonable belief that it is in breach of these terms. This will be investigated and could lead to a finding of misconduct or dismissal for gross misconduct in accordance with the university's Disciplinary Procedure.

For non-employees or workers e.g. contractor, volunteer or other, a breach of this policy may be deemed a breach of contractual terms, a similar process to the disciplinary procedure may be followed, which may result in your contract being terminated.