

Using Social Media – Guidance for Students

Social networking sites are now widely used for both socialising and work. They are readily accessible and offer an immediate means of communication. They are however relatively public and posted comments may be stored permanently. Care must therefore be taken by students not to cause offence or distress when making comments about individuals or their work.

The University has policies and procedures in place regarding the expected conduct towards others, whether that be verbal or written conduct¹. Breaches of these policies and procedures will result in disciplinary action being taken in accordance with the University's disciplinary regulations². If you are on a professional programme, you should take particular care to always demonstrate an ability to comply with the relevant professional code of conduct upon qualification and demonstrate your fitness to practise in your chosen profession.

Students should be aware that caveat statements on social networking sites such as "*these views are my own*" will not preclude the University from taking action if you are potentially identifiable as a Northumbria student and consequently bringing the University into disrepute.

Legislation is also in place to ensure that individuals are protected from online abuse. Criminal legislation includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Malicious Communications Act 1988, which makes it a criminal offence to send a communication with the intention of causing distress or anxiety;
- Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994;
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997;
- Communications Act 2003, which makes it a criminal offence to send "*...by means of a public electronic communications network a message or other matter that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character*".

¹ Copies of relevant policies, procedures, and guidance relating to conduct can be accessed via the Student Charter webpage available at <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/student-charter/>

² Students should consult Section 3 of the Handbook of Student Regulations for full details of the University's Disciplinary and Fitness to Practice Procedures available at www.northumbria.ac.uk/handbook

There is also a body of civil law dealing specifically with libel and slander.

The following good practice points should therefore be borne in mind when using any website discussion forum (including discussion groups associated with your programme of study):

- Remember that unknown others may see what you write;
- Never say anything that you know may cause offence or distress to others
- Remember that your comments may be saved and become a permanent record.

Therefore, always think before writing any comments about others, especially if they may in any way cause offence or distress.