



## **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

### **Purpose**

The College encourages the use of social media and associated services as they can make communication more efficient and effective and because they are valuable sources of information about vendors, customers, technology and new products and services. However, all employees and everyone connected with the College should remember that the use of social media must avoid any social media posts that bring the College into disrepute, and/or contradict the policies of the College, and/or contain negativity towards anyone directly connected with the College.

This policy covers the use of College-related social media accounts while at work, and personal use of social media, as it may impact (or be connected to) the College.

This policy should be viewed in conjunction with the entire Mutual Respect Policy which notes that inappropriate behaviour can take place on social media. Staff and Fellows are encouraged to consult the Mutual Respect Policy.

This policy cannot lay down rules to cover every possible situation. Instead, it is designed to express the College's philosophy regarding social media and to establish the general principles that employees should apply when using this form of interactive on-line media.

The College respects and is mindful of freedom of speech and believes that such freedoms (as set out in our Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech) must be upheld.

### **Scope**

All employees of Homerton College are covered by this policy. Fellows are also covered by this policy, while noting the above.

### **Definition of Social Media**

For the purposes of this policy, social media is a type of interactive on-line media that allows parties to communicate instantly with each other or to share data in a public forum. This includes social forums such as X, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. Social media also covers blogs, vlogs and other video and image sharing websites such as YouTube.

Employees should be aware that there are many more examples of social media than can be listed here and this is a constantly changing area. Employees should follow these guidelines in relation to any social media that they use.

## **Use of Social Media at work**

The College encourages employees to make reasonable and appropriate use of social media websites as part of their work. It is an important part of how the College communicates with its customers/students and promotes its services.

The College recognises that employees with active social media accounts and large followings are often the result of sharing their personality and that can have potential benefits to the College if the worker chooses to promote College-related content.

Employees may contribute to the College's social media activities, for example, by managing a Facebook account or running an official Twitter account. Employees must be aware at all times that while contributing to the College's social media activities, they are representing the College.

Employees using College-related accounts should use the same safeguards as they would with any other form of communication about the College in the public arena. Staff using social media as part of their job must adhere to the following rules and safeguards:-

- Making sure the communication has a purpose and a benefit for the College.
- Obtaining permission from a manager before embarking on a public social media campaign.
- Ensuring a manager or colleague has checked the content before it is published.

Any communication that employees make in a professional capacity through social media must not bring the College into disrepute by, for example:-

- Criticising or arguing with customers or colleagues.
- Making defamatory comments about individuals or other organizations or groups.
- Posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content.
- Breaching confidentiality eg. revealing information owned by the College or giving away confidential information about an individual such as a colleague or customer contact.
- Do anything that could be considered discriminatory, bullying or harassment of any individual eg. making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion, belief or age.

Fellows (of all categories), while not being staff, are encouraged to adhere to the above.

## **Excessive Use of Social Media at Work**

Employees should not spend an excessive amount of time whilst at work using social media websites, even if they claim to be doing so as part of their work. Employees should ensure that use of social media does not interfere with their other duties.

## **The Monitoring of Social Media During Work Time**

The College reserves the right to monitor an employee's internet usage but will endeavor to inform an affected employee when this is to happen and the reasons for it. The College considers that valid reasons for checking an employee's internet usage include suspicion that the employee has:-

- Been spending an excess amount of time using social media websites for non-work related activity.
- Acted in a way that is in breach of the rules set out in this policy.

The College reserves the right to retain information that it has been gathered on employees' use of the internet for a period of one year.

Access to particular social media websites may be withdrawn in any case of misuse.

## **Personal Use of Social Media**

Access to social media in a personal capacity at the College is restricted to lunch breaks and before and after the working day unless specific permission is granted by the line manager.

Exceptions to this policy are employees who are using social media to research a topic/issue with relevance to their work or who are using social media to keep up-to-date with news or new developments for a specific work purpose.

The College does recognise that many employees make use of social media in a personal capacity and whilst they are not acting on behalf of the College they can damage the College if they are recognised as being one of our employees. Employees are allowed to say that they work for the College, which recognises that it is natural for staff to discuss their work on social media. However, if employees discuss their work on social media, for example, giving an opinion on their specialism, they must include on their profile a statement along the following lines:-

“The views I express here are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of my employer”.

Employees who state in their profiles that all content is posted in a private capacity should recognise that this 'disclaimer' does not fully insulate them from that content being connected to the College.

Any communication that employees make in a personal capacity through social media must not bring the College into disrepute, for example:-

- Criticising or arguing with customers or colleagues.
- Making defamatory comments about individuals or other organizations or groups.
- Posting images that are inappropriate or links to inappropriate content.
- Breaching confidentiality eg. revealing information owned by the College or giving away confidential information about an individual such as a colleague or customer contact.
- Do anything that could be considered discriminatory, bullying or harassment of any individual eg. making offensive or derogatory comments relating to sex, gender reassignment, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion, belief or age.

## **Use of Social Media in Recruitment Process**

The HR Department and managers will not, either themselves or through a third party, conduct searches on applicants via social media during the final stages of the recruitment process.

Conducting these searches during the selection process might lead to a presumption that an applicant's protected characteristics, for example, sexual orientation or religious beliefs, may have played a part in a recruitment decision.

## **Disciplinary Action Over Social Media Use**

All employees are required to adhere to this policy. Employees should note that any breaches of this policy may lead to disciplinary action. Serious breaches of this policy, for example, bullying of colleagues or causing serious damage to the College may constitute gross misconduct and lead to summary dismissal.

## **Social Media Guidelines**

- (a) This set of social media guidelines aims to set standards that are expected of all employees with respect to the prevention of harassment; they are not intended to inhibit employees rights to freedom of speech.
- (b) You should be mindful that information shared on social media becomes public information and you should not use social media in any way that may compromise your reputation and, if you are studying or intending to work in a professional area such as health, education, social work or law, your 'fitness to practice'. Any content that you post about yourself or others could be brought to the attention of the College or University, future employers and/or professional bodies and may be detrimental to your studies and/or future career. It is increasingly common practice for employers to use the internet to search for information about, or the behaviour of, those whom they are considering for employment.
- (c) You may not claim to speak on behalf of the College on social media websites without the College's prior permission. You should not declare, imply or indicate that the content of any social media site under your control is representative of the College.
- (d) Social media (for example X, Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, Instagram and open forums and blogs) are now a common feature of everyday life, enabling and supporting both students and staff in academic and collaborative opportunities. Unfortunately, they are open to misuse and increasingly cited in cases of harassment, bullying and crime. Any form of harassment, including on social media platforms, is unacceptable and will be treated very seriously by the College.
- (e) You should be aware that while you yourself may not have posted offensive comments, by endorsing those made by others through, for example, retweeting, liking, commenting on or sharing the comments of others, you may thus be risking your own reputation and/or be breaching the College's disciplinary regulations. Comments made on social media may be subject to civil action if they can be reasonably be construed as defamatory or libelous: that is damaging someone's reputation and exposing them to hatred, ridicule or contempt. It is the same offence even if you have repeated comments by reposting or retweeting or otherwise endorsing them.
- (f) You should respect individual rights to privacy and have regard for the feelings of others. Social media can cause a negative mental health impact on those who, for example, are publicly criticised or insulted on on-line platforms. You must not disclose personal details, including pictures, of other students or staff without their prior permission.

- (g) You may not use the College's logos, crest etc. without the College's prior written permission.
- (h) You should be mindful of the enduring nature of information posted on social media sites and should be careful not to write posts or share information, particularly when under the influence of substances that can affect judgement or behaviour (eg. alcohol), that you may later come to regret.
- (i) If you require clarification on any aspects of this policy, please consult your line manager and/or contact: [communications@homerton.cam.ac.uk](mailto:communications@homerton.cam.ac.uk). There is an anonymous reporting form on our website. Anyone collecting data as part of research is advised to seek advice regarding data privacy considerations and ethics.
- (j) You should take precautions when utilising social media sites to ensure your own personal safety and to protect against identity theft. You should exercise caution when accepting or sending invitations to interact over social media with anyone you have not met face to face.