

Use of the Virtual Learning Environment and Social Media

1. Introduction

1.1 The University of Essex Online (UoEO) degree programmes are delivered entirely online using the UoEO virtual learning environment (VLE). This policy applies to all students, staff and associate tutors who use the VLE and any associated platforms used in the delivery of our online learning resources.

1.2 It is the duty of each user to ensure that they are using the VLE and associated platforms responsibly, professionally, ethically and lawfully.

2. Individual Responsibility

2.1 Access to the VLE is controlled by the use of User IDs and passwords. Users are responsible for ensuring that all User IDs and passwords are kept secure and not shared with others.

2.2 Individuals must not:

- Allow anyone else to use their personal User ID and password to access the learning platform
- Use someone else's User ID and password to access the learning platform
- Attempt to access data that they are not authorised to use or access
- Use the VLE Messaging or Discussion Forums for the purposes of harassment or abuse
- Use the VLE to make money, gamble, advertise or for political purposes
- Place any information on the VLE that relates to any student or staff member, or alter any such information, unless they are specifically authorised to do so.

3. PREVENT Duty

3.1 Under the Counter Terrorism Act 2015 we do have a statutory duty to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. The VLE and other online learning resources must not be used in such a way that would breach this or any other terrorism related legislation. If you do see any materials on the VLE which give you cause for concern you should report these to your tutor or Student Adviser.

3.2 If any staff member is concerned about any materials or information that they see on the VLE they should notify the Prevent Lead, who is the Quality and Enhancement Director.

4. Freedom of Speech

4.1 We are committed to freedom of speech and from time to time you may view material or opinions on the learning platform which you find difficult or disagree with. It is an important part of your academic experience that you develop the skills to critique, challenge and debate with others in an appropriate manner.

4.2 Nothing in this policy is intended to have the effect of limiting the freedom of speech or academic freedom, subject to that freedom being exercised within the law.

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5. Intellectual Property Rights and Copyright

5.1 We expect that students and staff will respect intellectual property and avoid infringing copyright.

5.2 Intellectual property is a term used to describe the rights that content creators have of their work.

5.3. Copyright is special permission to copy materials often sold by the creator of those materials to those who wish to copy them.

5.4 Staff and 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, and where sharing is permitted, should ensure that such materials or shared links are credited appropriately.

6. Behaviour and Netiquette

6.1 Real world standards of behaviour apply to the VLE and on social networking platforms such as Facebook, Blogger and Twitter.

6.2 Interactions in an online classroom are in written form. Your comfort level with expressing ideas and feelings in writing will add to your success in an online course. The ability to write is necessary, but you also need to understand what is considered appropriate when communicating online.

6.3 The word "netiquette" is short for "Internet etiquette". Rules of netiquette have grown organically with the Internet to help users act responsibly when they access or transmit information online.

6.4 As a UoEO student, you should be aware of the common rules of netiquette for the Web and employ a communication style that follows these guidelines:

- Wait to respond to a message that upsets you and be careful what you say and how you say it
- Be considerate. Rude or threatening language, inflammatory assertions (often referred to as "flaming"), personal attacks, and other inappropriate communication will not be tolerated
- Never post a message that is in all capital letters - it can be interpreted as SHOUTING! Use boldface and italics sparingly, as they can denote sarcasm
- Keep messages short and to the point
- Always practice good grammar, punctuation, and composition. This shows that you've taken the time to craft your response and that you respect your classmates' work
- Keep in mind that threaded discussions are meant to be constructive exchanges. Be respectful and treat everyone as you would want to be treated yourself.

7. Social Media

7.1 UoEO recognises the benefits and opportunities social media can provide to staff and students as a tool. It can be used to share news, provide important updates to the UoEO community and help us celebrate our successes. For the purpose of this policy social media is defined as any interactive online media platform that allows parties to communicate in a public forum.

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7.2 The following guidelines have been produced so that students and staff can enjoy the benefits of social networking whilst understanding the standards of conduct that we expect.

7.3 General advice:

- Staff and students should apply the same standards/etiquette on conduct when using social media channels as they expect to apply offline.
- Social media platforms are in the public domain – there can be no reasonable expectation that posts will remain private.
- Inappropriate behaviour via social media may constitute harassment and can be reported to the UoEO for further investigation.

8. Use of Social Media

8.1 Alongside the benefits of social media we also recognise that there are risks associated with its use. We acknowledge that staff and students may use social media in their private lives and for personal communications.

8.2 Personal communications are those made on, or from a private social media account. In all cases where a private social media account is used which identifies the UoEO, it must be made clear that the account holder is not expressing views on behalf of the UoEO.

9. Cyber Bullying

9.1 UoEO will not accept any form of bullying or harassment by, or of staff or students.

9.2 The following examples illustrate the types of behaviour, displayed through social media communications, which we consider to be 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.

9.3 Any student who is experiencing cyber bullying by another student or member of UoEO staff should report it in the first instance to their Student Adviser.

9.4 Any member of staff who is experiencing cyber bullying by member of staff or student of UoEO should report it to their Head of Department.

10. Monitoring and Learner Analytics

10.1 We reserve 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 the VLE, email and social media postings, to ensure our rules are being complied with and such activities are for legitimate purposes.

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10.2 We monitor and record the use of our VLE and associated platforms for the purposes of:

- the effective planning and operation of IT facilities
- understanding how the platform is used by our students
- helping us to develop and optimise the learning resources for the benefit of all our students
- investigating any alleged misconduct.

10.3 Learner Analytics

Learning analytics is the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about students and their engagement with the VLE, for the purpose of understanding and optimising learning and the environments in which it occurs.

All data captured as a result of the student's interaction with the VLE has the potential to provide information for learning analytics. Data will, however, only be used for learning analytics where there is likely to be an expected benefit to students' learning.

10.4 Data collection and use

As with most other web servers, when you access the learning platform certain information you provide will automatically be recorded by UoEO. This may include your IP address, browser type, and information relating to the pages you visit. This information is processed to analyse how the VLE is being used and in the event of a breach of security may be used to aid investigation. This data is also used to automate a small number of customised interventions aimed at supporting students' individual needs based on their interactions with the VLE.

The VLE also uses Google Analytics cookies to help us improve our learning platform and anonymously identify which pages are being read and how the platform is being accessed. For more information Google's privacy policy is available at www.google.com/privacypolicy.html.

10.5 Data Protection Act 1998

The Data Protection Act 1998 ("DPA") applies to social media as it does to other contexts. You must ensure that all posts comply with the DPA.

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

11. Incidents and Response

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

11.2 Breaches of this policy may result in immediate withdrawal or suspension of the user's access rights, and potential disciplinary action in accordance with other existing policies and procedures.

11.3 Where conduct may be illegal or of concern under the Prevent Duty, UoEO may report the matter to the police or Regional Prevent Coordinator.

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11.4 Reporting

Any complaints received under this policy will be reported, on an anonymised basis where appropriate, to the relevant body within UoEO or where relevant, the University of Essex.

Responsible Manager: Stephen Livesey	Date: 22 August 2016
Title	Head of Learning Technology
Date due for review	July 2017
Related Policies and Procedures	Data Protection Policy Student Code of Conduct Policy