

ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS POLICY (SOCIAL MEDIA & WEBSITE CONTENT)

Owned by: Chief Executive Officer

Date passed: February 2026

Body passing: Senior Leadership Team

Valid until: Annual review

Version: 1.0

1. Purpose

This policy sets out expectations for the responsible use of **online communication channels** by Winchester Students' Union (WinchSU). It aims to:

- Protect students and the wider community
- Safeguard the reputation of the Students' Union and University
- Ensure compliance with legal and regulatory duties, including the Online Safety Act
- Provide clarity on acceptable conduct and accountability

2. Scope

This policy applies to all WinchSU affiliated online communications, including:

- Social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, Facebook, X/Twitter, TikTok, Discord, WhatsApp, YouTube)
- Students' Union–managed or affiliated website pages
- Blogs, news posts, and statements
- Event listings and election content
- Embedded media (images, videos, links, documents)
- Comment, feedback, or interaction tools (where enabled)

The policy applies to:

- Staff and volunteers

- Elected and appointed Trustees
- Elected student officers
- Activity group committees (sports teams, societies, representational networks)
- Any individual posting on behalf of, or reasonably perceived to represent, the Students' Union

3. Core Principles

All online communications should be:

- **Lawful**
- **Respectful and encourage inclusivity**
- **Accurate and responsible**
- **Consistent with WinchSU code of conduct and policies**

Freedom of expression is respected but does not override legal obligations, safeguarding responsibilities, or the duty of care to others.

4. Account & Page Ownership

Official Social Media Accounts

- Must be registered with the Students' Union.
- Login access must be held by at least two authorised individuals (i.e. committee members, staff members etc).
- Accounts must be handed over promptly following elections or role changes.
- WinchSU reserves the right to request access where required for safeguarding, legal, or reputational reasons.

Website Pages

- Activity group and officer webpages form part of the WinchSU's official online presence.
- WinchSU may retain editorial and publishing control.
- Content may be edited, unpublished, or removed where necessary.

Personal Accounts

- Individuals remain responsible for their personal accounts.
- Where a person is clearly identifiable as representing WinchSU, conduct may still fall under this policy and/or code of conduct and/or staff disciplinary procedures, if it impacts students, WinchSU, or the University.

5. Acceptable Use

Users must:

- Communicate respectfully with students, staff, and the public
- Ensure content is accurate and not misleading
- Respect confidentiality and privacy
- Follow platform terms and conditions
- Comply with all relevant WinchSU policies, including:
 - Code of Conduct
 - Equality, Diversity & Inclusion policies
 - Safeguarding policies
 - Data protection requirements

6. Prohibited Content & Behaviour

The following must **not** be posted, shared, hosted, or endorsed on any WinchSU-affiliated online channel:

- Illegal content, including hate crime, threats, harassment, or incitement to violence
- Discriminatory, abusive, or hateful language
- Bullying or harassment
- Sexually explicit or extreme content
- Promotion of illegal activity
- Content encouraging self-harm or suicide
- Misinformation presented as fact
- Confidential or personal data shared without consent
- Content likely to bring the Students' Union or University into disrepute

7. Moderation & Monitoring

- Committees, staff, volunteers, trustees and officers are responsible for monitoring the online spaces they manage.
- Content that breaches this policy must be removed promptly.
- Where identified content may be illegal or presents a safeguarding risk, it must be reported immediately to the Students' Union (see section 8)

The Students' Union may:

- Require or carry out content removal
- Temporarily suspend posting or publishing
- Restrict access to accounts or pages
- Assume moderation control where necessary

8. Reporting Concerns

Concerns about online communications should be reported via the Students' Union's designated reporting process and may include:

- Illegal or harmful content
- Safeguarding concerns
- Inaccurate or misleading information
- Reputational risk
- Breaches of this policy

To make such a report please use one of the following methods:

- ~ (for students or staff) **Online Reporting Form:** Submit a report via the Students' Union's official reporting form at <https://www.winchesterstudents.co.uk/report>
- ~ (for staff only) **Email:** Report the content to student.union@winchester.ac.uk, marked "*URGENT – Online Safety Concern*"

Reports should include:

- The platform or webpage where the content appears
- A brief description of the concern
- Screenshots or links where possible

Content must not be shared further, commented on publicly, or engaged with.

Reports will be handled sensitively and proportionately.

9. Breaches & Sanctions

Breaches of this policy may result in:

- Content removal or amendment
- Mandatory training or guidance
- Temporary suspension of posting or publishing rights
- Removal from committee or officer roles
- Disciplinary action under WinchSU's Code of Conduct

Serious incidents may be escalated to:

- The University
- External regulators or agencies
- Law enforcement (where required by law)

10. Support & Training

The Students' Union will seek to provide:

- Guidance and training for staff, volunteers, officers and committees
- Advice on managing challenging online situations
- Support for individuals experiencing online abuse

11. Review & Governance

- This policy will be reviewed annually or following significant incidents or legislative change.
- Oversight sits with the Students' Union Senior Leadership Team ~~and Trustees.~~

Summary If you communicate online on behalf of the Students' Union, you must do so responsibly, remove harmful content quickly, report serious issues, and remember you are representing others.