E-COMMUNICATION POLICY AND GUIDELINES

TYPE: Policy & guidelines

PURPOSE: These guidelines set out Solihull College & University Centre's strategy for communicating with students, employers, potential customers and staff and the principles which students are expected to follow.

SCOPE: This policy applies to students.

RESPONSIBILITY: The Vice Principal HR & Student Services is responsible for this policy. The Director Student Services is responsible for the monitoring of the policy.

LEGAL CONTEXT: Laws on copyright, Data Protection, privacy, defamation, slander, Communications Act 2003. KCSiE 2022

SECTION 1: Introduction and Purpose

Guidelines for Students

The following document is to be used in conjunction with Solihull College & University Centre's (SCUC) Code of Conduct; the Computer & Telephone Acceptable Use (Students) Policy; the Safeguarding of Young People and Vulnerable Adults Policy.

These guidelines set out Solihull College & University Centre's strategy for communicating with students, employers, potential customers and staff and the principles which students are expected to follow.

The document gives interpretations for current forms of communication. Interactive technology is fast moving and it is impossible to cover all circumstances. However, the principles set out in this document should always be followed. For this purpose the document will be subject to regular review by the senior leadership.

Solihull College & University Centre recognises that digital social networking is extremely popular and acknowledges the right of students to freedom of expression. Whilst students are encouraged to recognise and make use of the obvious benefits to learning of interactive technology, they must also be aware of the potential legal implications of material which could be considered abusive or defamatory.

The intention of this document is to provide a structured and managed approach to communicating with other students, employers, and staff via social media.

Furthermore, it is not to stop students from conducting legitimate activities but is intended to highlight those areas in which issues, in particular in relation to Safeguarding Young People and Vulnerable Adults, and bullying and harassment of students or staff, can arise.

The purpose of this guidance is therefore:

- To ensure that professional boundaries are maintained for the protection of both staff and students
- To ensure that students and employees of Solihull College & University Centre are not placing themselves at risk of an allegation being made that their conduct in communicating with others is inappropriate
- To protect the reputation of employees of Solihull College & University Centre as a whole from abuse through staff usage of social networking and personal internet sites.

SECTION 2: Safeguarding students in online learning and communication between staff and students

Where college staff are delivering lessons online or virtually, all such lessons will be delivered in accordance with the college's safeguarding Young People and Vulnerable Adults, staff behaviour (code of conduct) and acceptable use of ICT policies. This will ensure that the college's filtering software is enabled.

The college will take account of guidance from DfE in relation to the planning and delivery of online learning when it is issued; as well as nationally recognised guidance including *guidance from the UK Safer Internet Centre on safe remote learning* and *London Grid for Learning on the use of videos and livestreaming*.

Staff will always use college owned devices and accounts for the delivery of online/virtual lessons/tutorials. Where possible, applications that facilitate the recording of lessons will be used subject to data protection and retention/storage guidelines.

When delivering online/virtual lessons on a one-to-one basis or communicating with vulnerable young people who are not attending college via video chat, staff will speak to parents/carers before lessons/conversations commence and when they finish before logging off.

It is important that all staff who interact with young people online continue to look out for signs that a young person may be at risk, distressed for some reason or vulnerable in some other way; and report and record any concerns to the DSL in the normal way. The DSL will respond to any such concern as they would any other safeguarding concern.

Before recording a live lesson, tutors require approval from their Head of School to ensure that the requirements set out in this policy will be met.

When recording online sessions, teachers must ensure that students are notified in advance and at the point the recording has started.

The college will ensure that online learning tools and systems are used in line with privacy and data protection/GDPR requirements.

Below are other issues that staff need to take into account when delivering online/virtual lessons or communicating with young people online, particularly where webcams are used:

- Staff and students must be fully dressed and wear suitable clothing, as should anyone else in the household.
- Any computers used should be in appropriate areas, for example not in bedrooms; and the background should be blurred. If it is not possible to blur the background, staff must consider what students can see in the background and whether it would be appropriate in a classroom. This includes photographs, artwork, identifying features, mirrors etc.
- Staff will ensure that resources and videos used are age appropriate – the student may not have support immediately to hand at home if they feel distressed or anxious about content.
- Live classes will be kept to a reasonable length of time so that students do not have too much screen time and in order to minimise disruption for the family.
- Language must be professional and appropriate, including that used by any family members in the background.
- Staff must only use platforms specified by the college.
- Staff should record the length, time, date and attendance of any sessions held.

Staff members delivering lessons or communicating with students online/virtually will raise any issues in respect of inappropriate dress, setting, behaviour etc with the child and/or parent immediately and will end the online interaction if necessary. Any such incident will be recorded and reported to the DSL.

If a staff member believes that a student or parent is recording a lesson or conversation without prior consent, the lesson will be brought to an end or the young person will be logged out immediately.

SECTION 3: Social Media

Definition of social media
In the context of this document, social media includes all types of electronic and digital communication. This means:

   a. all websites (including mobile phone apps and desktop applications) that facilitate the communication of written words, videos, images and photography over the Internet. This would include sites such as (though not restricted to) Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, and MySpace, but also web blogs, user groups and web forums, website user comments and email discussion lists
   b. mobile phone use including texting
   c. use of tablets
   d. email

Solihull College & University Centre's philosophy on social media
Social media is increasingly becoming a practical and enjoyable means for many people to communicate with their friends, family and peers.

Social media provides the opportunity to facilitate good and constructive communication between staff, lecturers, students and prospective students..

SCUC recognises the potential to help reinforce public relations and engage with our wider audience and stake holders, from new and prospective students through to local businesses and media agencies.

Why use social media?

Staff can use social media as another way to: share news of assignment dates, trips and events, share pictures of student events (but they must have your permission to use your photograph) and promotional videos.

Students as representatives of Solihull College & University Centre
We want our students to be proud of being a Solihull College & University Centre Student. During induction students will learn about the expectations we have of them as students and the expectations they can have of us. We have a professional responsibility to protect those who are potentially vulnerable and be respectful of colleagues and students. SCUC staff have an obligation as employees to support and protect the reputation of the College when engaging in any public relations activities. This refers to activity both on official social media sites and personal social media usage.

Referring to other students or staff on personal social media
The college promotes positive working relationships. These can easily be damaged by a thoughtless comment. Whilst we understand that online conversations can and do replace face to face conversations between students, under no circumstances should you make reference to any student or member of staff that is negative or disparaging.
Any student, who can be identified as a student of the College/ university centre through personal social media sites must also adhere to the Code of Conduct. Negative or disparaging comments made by individuals regarding college staff or students within social or digital media falls under the same Code of Conduct. Bullying via social media, phone, tablet or email will not be tolerated in any form and the Disciplinary Procedure will be applied if this takes place. The police may also be informed dependent on the circumstances.

Confidential information
Discussions on social media sites are often informal so it's important to remember that you must not discuss or share any confidential information regarding another student.

Copyright, defamation and other legal issues
Please be mindful of UK laws that may be brought to bear upon your use of social media.

For example, posting someone else's work without permission is not only socially unacceptable but may also be in violation of copyright laws, and allow others to plagiarise student or staff work. Flippant or irresponsible comments may similarly breach laws.

Please also be aware that there are laws that protect an individual's or organisation's reputation whenever a statement regarding them is published or communicated to a third party. Should the content be deemed to be inappropriate or bring the College's reputation into disrepute then this may lead to an internal investigation in line with the Disciplinary Procedure and appropriate action taken.

Note: Individuals have been taken to court for making slanderous comments on Twitter.

Acceptable use
We actively encourage students to use social media to collaborate, organise and aid the discussion and exploration of their courses, course subjects and course work. Any social media sites in use in the college are set up by Marketing or Learning Technologies.

Unacceptable use
Where it is found that a student or representative of SCUC fails to abide by these guidelines and engages in damaging or abusive dialogue or communications, disregarding their obligations as a student to act responsibly on social media networks, we will have no option but to progress the matter to disciplinary. We will conduct a formal investigation in line with the Disciplinary Procedure and a decision will be made about the student's place in college.

Social media Dos and Do Nots!
Do

- Positively engage with your fellow students and/or staff if a social media page is in place for your course
- Follow SCUC on Twitter, Instagram and/or Facebook

Do not

- Attempt to become 'friends' online with staff outside of the professional contact via a course Facebook page
- Attempt to contact staff by text or mobile phone unless you are given a college phone number, for example, for use during a trip or visit or are calling the official college number
- Name individuals, make negative comments or encourage negative debate
- Use images or video or music without permission
- Offer up personal information that would be inappropriate to others
- Make inappropriate personal comments online
- Publish pictures or videos that may be considered harassing, libellous, abusive, threatening, harmful, obscene, damaging to individuals or the College

reputation, or personal dignity, or otherwise disparaging or objectionable in any manner or nature.
- Impersonate other individuals when you submit information.

If you have a concern about any aspect of social media involving SCUC students or staff, including cyber bullying, speak to your personal tutor or one of the Safeguarding Officers.

SECTION 4: SOLIHULL COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY CENTRE WEBSITES (including Apps)

solihull.ac.uk and **stratford.ac.uk** are the main websites. Other approved sites may exist at any given time.

Any site purporting to be a Solihull College & University Centre site **MUST** be authorised by the Executive Management Team and managed by the Marketing Department/Learning Technologies.

Solihull College & University Centre Facebook Pages

http://www.facebook.com/Solihull.College

SCUC's Facebook page (managed by Marketing) together with Moodle, provides the opportunity and forums for controlled student academic and college related discussion. In exceptional circumstances, and only with the approval of the EMT, additional SCUC Facebook sites may be created. These will be managed following a strict protocol.

i. If approved by EMT, Marketing will set up the page and give user admin rights to the appropriate member of staff (you will need to be a Facebook user).

ii. The Marketing Manager in consultation with the School Head will name your Facebook page, and use the following convention:
Solihull.College – 'your course'; or Solihull.College – 'your service'.

iii. When adding photos and images of people or their work you must have their explicit, written permission to do so.

Please bear in mind we have a responsibility to protect our students and any vulnerable or at risk individuals, in which case it may often be inappropriate to include photos and personal details of students.

iv. Marketing will post relevant messages across all SCUC Facebook pages.

Twitter

https://twitter.com/SolihullCollege

SCUC has an Official Twitter account. No other Twitter accounts should be set up without the express authorisation of EMT.

YouTube

http://www.youtube.com/user/TeamSolihull

There are many issues and pitfalls associated with setting up You Tube sites, for instance around:

- Copyright
- Accuracy
- Privacy rights

For this reason SCUC must ensure that content on You Tube is managed centrally and in a structured way.

SCUC has a Youtube account. Any video content must be passed to the Marketing team to be published on your behalf.

LinkedIn

http://uk.linkedin.com/in/solihullcollege

LinkedIn is a networking site for professionals. Hence, its benefit is really for keeping in touch with ex-students and businesses. Staff cannot be in contact through Linked In with students who are currently enrolled at SCUC.

Other sites

There are many other social networking sites, with new ones particularly exploring geo-location tools on smartphones, popping up all the time. Again, if you are looking at trying out any other form of social media, please be aware that the same controls will apply.

SECTION 5: MOBILE PHONES

Use of personal mobile phones

Most students own a mobile phone and should expect contact from SCUC staff to this number.

Contact will be from college landline numbers, on occasions work mobile phones, by text via Pro-Monitor or Text Tools. SCUC owned mobile phones are available for staff for trips off site etc.

Staff will not use their personal mobile phones to contact students and will not give students home or personal mobile phone numbers.

Please be mindful that mobile phones can be misused, for instance uploading of inappropriate content onto file sharing video sites, inappropriate messages to harass or intimidate others. Students are reminded of our expectations under section 5 above.

If you need to take images as part of your learning eg a group activity, as a record of a trip or an event, then you should ask your tutor for use of a SCUC owned camera. You must not take images using your mobile phone.

In **rare and exceptional circumstances** where staff urgently need to contact a student or parent by telephone and do not have access to a school-owned device, they will discuss this with a senior member of staff. If it is agreed there is no alternative to using a personally owned device, staff members will always use 'caller withheld' to ensure the pupil and/or parent is not able to identify the staff member's personal contact details.

Text Messaging

The ability to use text messaging provides new opportunities for the college as it facilitates the spread of information to potential students, current students and colleagues.

We expect our staff to ensure that all communications are made within the guidelines as defined in SCUC's staff policy on the use of internet and email, for their own protection and for that of the students.

Students will be contacted by text using Pro-Monitor, text tools or from an approved SCUC owned phone.

SECTION 5: DISPLAY SCREENS / TV SCREENS

Display and TV screens are an official method for communicating approved content to students. Any screens and their usage must be approved by the Executive Management Team.

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Pete Haynes / Adam Thomas	2015	EMT	June 2023	June 2024