

# **Student Social Media Policy**

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 The Royal Veterinary College recognises that social media provides unique opportunities to participate in interactive discussions, engage with the wider community, and share information using a wide variety of media. The College encourages students to engage in appropriate and responsible use of social media, which allows for useful communication channels and maintains the wellbeing of individuals and the wider community.

1.2 However, use of social media can pose risks to both students and the College. These include risk to the College's reputation and compliance with legal obligations. Students may also be at risk of committing offences or projecting an image that does not conform to their professional standards, which may have long term effects on their professional reputation. To minimise these risks the College requires students to adhere to this policy, which outlines student responsibilities when using social media. Staff are also asked to adhere to the [Staff Social Media Policy](#).

1.3 Nothing in this Policy is intended to restrict or undermine the right to academic freedom.

## **2. Purpose and scope of the policy**

2.1 This policy covers all individuals studying at all levels at the College, including undergraduate, postgraduate (including PhD), visiting and distance learning students, students on overseas partnerships, Interns and Residents (collectively referred to as students).

2.2 This policy covers the use of all forms of social media, including but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Snapchat, The Student Room, Twitter, Reddit, LinkedIn, and Wikipedia. The College has a separate policy regarding acceptable use of the College's IT systems.

2.3 This policy applies to the use of social media for both study and personal purposes, whether during study hours or otherwise. The policy applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using the College's IT facilities and equipment or equipment belonging to students.

2.4 The purpose of this policy is to encourage good practice and wellbeing through guidance on the use of social media; to protect the College, its staff, clients and students; to clarify where and how existing policies and procedures apply to social media and to promote effective and innovative use of social media as part of the College's activities.

## **3. Student's Responsibility**

3.1 Students are expected to be mindful of how their identity, statements or views appear online and are advised that placement providers, employers and industry contacts may view

social media profiles when deciding to take on a placement student or when hiring to get an idea of a candidate's character, personality or employability.

3.2 Students should therefore be conscious of making posts today that may hinder them, both personally and professionally, in the future.

3.3 Students may find starting university to be a good time to consider their previous social media history is going to be appropriate for the future and possibly consider some "strategic deletions".

All students are expected to adhere to the RVC social media policy. Additionally students on courses that lead to RCVS registration must follow the guidelines of their regulatory bodies.

3.4 Students need to understand the expectations regarding professionalism and confidentiality. The RCVS has produced fitness to practice guidelines for [Veterinary Schools and Veterinary Students](#), as well as guidelines for [Veterinary Nursing Students and Veterinary Nurses](#). The [RCVS Social Media Guidelines](#) should also be followed by veterinary and veterinary nursing students. Breaching these guidelines could affect a student's ability to study and career opportunities.

## **4. Behaviour and conduct on social media**

4.1 Students are personally responsible for what they communicate on or through social media and they must adhere to the standards of behaviour set out in this policy and any related policies.

4.2 Society is increasingly using social media for raising complaints. However, any students wishing to raise a complaint should do so through the Student Complaints Procedure. This is the fastest way to get a response and resolution to your problem.

4.3 Use of social media must not infringe on the rights, or privacy, of other students, clients, staff or College partners and students must not make ill-considered comments or judgements about other students, staff, clients, patients, placement providers or other third parties.

(a) Students must not post anything that the College's students, clients, business partners, suppliers, vendors or other stakeholders may find offensive, including discriminatory comments, insults or obscenities.

(b) Students must not post anything (e.g. comments or images) related to their peers without their prior permission.

(c) Students must not post any images of animals, living or dead, or images of animals or parts of animals they have contact with as a result of the candidature.

(d) Students should consider carefully posting anything (e.g. comments or images) related to staff, clients, patients, placement providers, or other stakeholders without their (or an owner's) prior written permission.

4.4 We recommend that permission to share third party material, including all images, photography, text and videos, should be sought and recorded in a tangible format before uploading them to, or linking them through, social media. Furthermore, where permission is obtained, we recommend such materials should be credited appropriately.

4.5 The following non-exhaustive list is considered to be of an unacceptable nature and should never be posted:

- (a) Confidential information (which may include research not yet in the public domain, information about fellow students or staff or personal matters, non-public or not yet approved documents or information)
- (b) Information in any form (such as photographs) of animals or clients at the RVC or at placements. This includes live and deceased animals, as well as cadaver tissue. In respect of animals that are the property of the RVC, and cadaver material of teaching sessions, permission must be agreed with a member of staff and the local rules of the anatomy museum, dissection room and the live animals' spaces must be followed.
- (c) Details of complaints/potential complaints and/or legal proceedings/potential legal proceedings involving the College
- (d) Personal information about another individual, including contact information, without their express permission
- (e) Comments posted using fake accounts, made-up names or using another person's name without their consent
- (f) Inappropriate material, including images, video, podcasts or other content that is, or may be perceived to be threatening, harassing, discriminatory, illegal, obscene, indecent, defamatory, or hostile towards any individual, group or entity
- (g) Any other posting that constitutes, or may constitute, a criminal offence
- (h) Anything which may bring the College into disrepute or compromise the safety or reputation of colleagues, former colleagues, students, staff and those connected with the College.

4.6 Students should be aware that statements on social media that cause harm to an individual, including to their reputation, or that interfere with an ongoing disciplinary/legal process may create a potential claim against the individual making the statement. Furthermore, this may extend to the sharing of statements made by others.

4.7 Students should also be aware that communications on social media are also subject to legislation, which aim to prevent interference with legal proceedings regardless of intent to do so.

4.8 An individual, including the complainant, may undermine proceedings or processes by publishing information, including imagery, relating to existing or potential complaints and/or legal proceedings. This may be done in the heat of the moment; however, students should be aware that by doing so they might bring the College into disrepute or compromise the safety of the College community. As such, this conduct may be seen to be of an unacceptable nature, as per paragraph 4.5 above.

4.9 Students must take particular care not to state or imply that their views are those of the RVC when using social media, nor use the College logo or Crest at any time without prior written approval of the External Relations Department

- (a) If students are uncertain or concerned about the appropriateness of any statement or posting, they should refrain from making the communication.

(b) If students see content in social media that disparages or reflects poorly on the College or its stakeholders, they should contact the Advice Centre, their tutor, Senior Tutor, Vice Principal for Students or Director of Learning and Wellbeing.

4.10 Respecting intellectual property and confidential information:

(a) Students should not do anything to jeopardise the College's trade secrets and other confidential information and intellectual property through the use of social media.

(b) Students should avoid misappropriating or infringing the intellectual property of other organisations and individuals, which can create liability for the College, as well as the student themselves.

(c) To protect themselves and the College against liability for copyright infringement, where appropriate, students should reference sources of particular information they post or upload and cite them accurately. If students have any questions about whether a particular post might violate anyone's copyright or trademark, they should seek advice from the Head of Marketing and Communications before making a communication.

4.11 Students should avoid posting comments about sensitive business-related topics, such as the College's performance. Even if students make it clear that their views on such topics do not represent those of the College, their comments could still damage the College's reputation or breach confidentiality obligations.

## **5. Cyber bullying**

5.1 The College will not accept any form of bullying or harassment by or of its staff or students or stakeholders.

5.2 There is no legal definition of bullying but according to [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) it is usually defined as behaviour that is repeated, intended to hurt and aimed at certain groups.

5.3 The following non-exhaustive list of examples illustrate the types of behaviour, displayed through social media, which the College considers to be forms of cyber bullying:

(a) Maliciously, negligently or recklessly spreading rumours, lies or gossip;

(b) Intimidating or aggressive behaviour, as perceived by those viewing social media;

(c) Offensive or threatening comments or content, as perceived by those viewing social media;

(d) Posting comments/photos or other content deliberately, negligently or recklessly mocking an individual with the potential to harass or humiliate them, as perceived by those viewing the social media.

5.4 Cyber bullying may also take place via other means of electronic communication such as email, text or instant messaging.

5.5 If you are a victim of Cyber bullying or are concerned about other students' wellbeing you should contact the Advice Centre.

## 6. Compliance with related policies

6.1 Social media should never be used in a way that would breach the College's policies for other media. If an online post would breach any of the College's policies in another forum, it will also breach them in an online forum. For example, students are prohibited from using social media to:

- (a) breach the College's [IT Acceptable Use Policy](#);
- (b) breach the [RVC Charter](#);
- (c) breach the [Code of Practice for Interns and Residents](#)
- (d) breach any obligations with respect to the rules of relevant regulatory bodies;

RCVS has produced fitness to practice guidelines for [Veterinary Schools and Veterinary Students](#), as well as guidelines for [Veterinary Nursing Students and Veterinary Nurses](#).

- (e) breach any obligations students may have relating to confidentiality;
- (f) breach the [College's Disciplinary Procedure](#);
- (g) defame or disparage the College or its affiliates, clients, students, business partners, suppliers, or other stakeholders;
- (h) harass or bully other students in any way or breach the College's [Dignity at Work Policy](#);
- (i) unlawfully discriminate against other students or third parties or breach the [College's Equal Opportunities Policy](#);
- (j) breach the [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Expression](#)
- (k) breach the Data Protection Act or the [College's Data Protection Policy](#) (for example, never disclose personal information about a colleague online); or
- (l) breach any other laws or ethical standards (for example, social media should never be used in a false or misleading way, such as by students claiming to be someone other than themselves or by making misleading statements).

## 7. Student's use of official College accounts

7.1 If a student wishes to create a College social media account or take over the running of an existing account, prior written approval and guidance must be sought from the College's Director of External Relations.

7.2 If a student is required to speak on behalf of the College in a social media environment (for any official reasons), approval must be sought for such communication from the Principal or Director of External Relations who may advise them to undergo training before they do so and impose certain requirements and restrictions with regard to social media activities. The only exception to this is when the student has previously been expressly authorised to speak on behalf of the College on a particular subject in a social media environment and is communicating on the same subject.

7.3 If students are contacted for comments about the College for publication anywhere, including in social media, they must direct the inquiry to the Head of Marketing and Communications and must not respond without written approval. If this is in relation to the

scientific or veterinary medicine specific communication in the veterinary or scientific press confirmation should also be obtained from the Course Director.

## **8. Breach of the Policy**

8.1 Breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action, including suspension from the College or referral to the Professional Requirements Procedure or Professional Bodies. Any student suspected of breaching this policy will be required to co-operate with the College's investigation, which may involve handing over relevant passwords and login details. The College also reserves the right to suspend internet and college account access where it deems it necessary during an investigation. When considering any potential breach of this policy, the College will consider the context of any social media posting.

8.2 Students will be required to remove posts which are deemed to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may in itself result in disciplinary action.

## **9. Implementation and Monitoring**

9.1 The Information Security Group (ISecG) has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy, but has delegated day-to-day responsibility for its operation to the Director of Learning and Wellbeing. Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for change to minimise risks, and to ensure that it meets legal requirements and reflects best practice also lies with the Director of Learning and Wellbeing.

9.2 All students are responsible for the effectiveness of this policy and should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the Advice Centre or to the Director of Learning and Wellbeing.

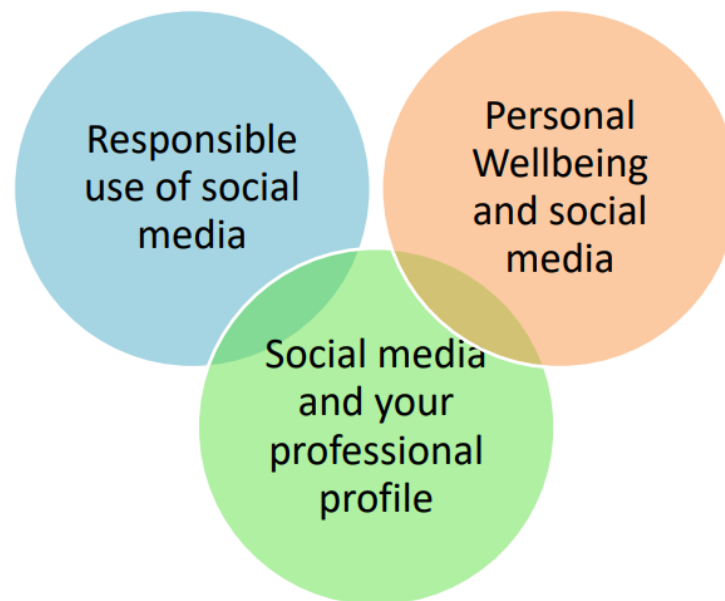
9.3 The contents of the College's IT resources and communications systems are the College's property. Therefore, students should have no expectation of privacy in any message, social media post conversation or message, or any other kind of information or communications transmitted to, received or printed from, or stored or recorded on the College's electronic information and communications systems.

9.4 The College reserves the right to monitor, intercept and review, without further notice, student activities using its IT resources and communications systems, including but not limited to social media postings and activities, to the extent permitted or as required by law, to ensure that the College's rules are being complied with. For further information, please refer to the College's IT Acceptable Use Policy.

## Annex A – Guidelines for the use of social media

We can all recognise the benefits and opportunities that social media can present but it is important to remember it comes with risks and challenges.

This guidance is intended to help you make sensible decisions around your use of social media and digital presence.



### 1. Responsible use of social media

- **Everything you post online is public.** Once you have posted to social media (even seemingly more private forms like WhatsApp or personal messaging) you cannot control how it is used. Consider whether you would be happy for your message to be seen in the public domain and how it could impact your future and that of other students or the RVC.
- **Think carefully before you post.** Would you be comfortable saying directly to a family member, lecturer or future employer what you are posting on social media? If not, it may be best not to post the message. Because you cannot control where your message will end up, it is sensible to operate a 'better safe than sorry' policy. There have been numerous accounts of students being disciplined for private social media posts or messages that have been shared without consent.
- **Consider how the content of a message you send may appear to others.** Text, image and video messages all have the potential to cause upset and damage to your personal and professional reputation. Will someone else perceive your message in a different way? What might a future employer think of what you have shared? Social media posts are like digital tattoos that we cannot get rid of easily. Employers are increasingly checking the digital footprint of potential staff members including looking at historic posts.

- **Understand the expectations regarding professionalism and confidentiality.** The RCVS has produced fitness to practice guidelines for [Veterinary Schools and Veterinary Students](#), as well as guidelines for [Veterinary Nursing Students and Veterinary Nurses](#) and [Social Media Guidelines](#). Breaching these guidelines could affect your ability to study and any future career. Students not on these courses are also expected to adhere to the RVC social media policy.
- **Consider how the message could affect your own reputation and that of the college.** You have a responsibility to yourself but you also have a responsibility to uphold the reputation of the college. Any post that breaches the RVC social media policy could lead to disciplinary action being taken against you.
- **Be aware of what you're sharing.** Do you need permission to share materials, or should you ask as a matter of courtesy? You should also consider the contents of what you are sharing. Have you checked it thoroughly and are you aware of any links, images or videos that you may not have noticed? It is much easier to thoroughly check what you are sending than undo what you have already sent.

## 2. Personal wellbeing and social media

- **How much time are you spending on your social media accounts?** Social media is designed to be addictive, encouraging you to invest time in your account. If you are preoccupied about social media when not on it, need to use social media for gratification or are unable to control your usage of social media it may be time for a detox.
- **Take a social media detox regularly.** Try logging out of your accounts, removing the apps from your phone and see how this affects your wellbeing. We should all be regularly detoxing from social media to ensure it is not having too big an impact on our lives.
- **What are the benefits of your social media experience?** Are you finding it to be a useful, positive experience? There are lots of benefits to using social media but it is good to check in and review the accounts you are following and how it is making you feel. If you come away from social media unhappy or frustrated it may be a good idea to reconsider how you use it.
- **Limit the amount of time you spend on social media.** Social media is a tool and used wisely **can** be beneficial. However, if used incorrectly or too much it can become dangerous to us. Try choosing what you think is a sensible amount of time to spend on social media and then limit yourself to this.
- **What to do when things go wrong.** All social media platforms should have a system for reporting **bullying** or inappropriate content. If you are concerned about content and the impact it may be having on the wellbeing of yourself or a fellow student, you should go to the Advice Centre for support in the next steps to take. They can help to provide guidance relating to the issue.



### 3. Social media and your professional profile

- **Do you use your social media accounts to help with your future?** There is lots of information about your future options available through social media. This can be about **employers**, post grad opportunities, volunteering and self-employment. Use social media explain opportunities available to you.
- **Manage your online presence.** What does your digital presence look like? Do you manage it **coherently**? Make sure that your digital presence reflects your current interests both on a professional and personal level, particularly if you have chosen for your account to be public.
- **Take time regularly to review what you are posting / liking / following.** Future employers **explore** and check your digital presence. This is also a good thing to do to ensure you are 'targeting' your 'socials' time effectively to keep you informed about future opportunities. The careers consultants can talk through with you how to manage your social media accounts to develop a professional online presence.
- **Consider what you want to get out of social media.** If you are planning on using social media as a professional tool, shape your accounts to promote your professional interests, **skills** and experiences. If you're not planning on using social media professionally, remember that it's still a reflection of you and employers will still check it regardless of your intent.

#### Acknowledgments

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DeMontfort University, Student Social Media Policy, 2018, Ryan Ward

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Amendments: