Social Media Policy

Purpose and Context

1. The NFTS ('we', 'the School') recognises the numerous benefits and opportunities that social media presents. We ourselves actively use social media to engage with students, apprentices, staff and the general public to communicate information, celebrate success and enhance our profile. This policy has been created to help students and apprentices understand the reputational, legal and ethical implications of social media usage and what happens when it is misused, intentionally or otherwise. It seeks to protect students, apprentices, the School and its staff from the misuse of social media and clarify where and how existing School policies and guidelines apply to social media.

Scope

2. This policy applies to all students and apprentices of the School who engage in online conversations or share content in the context of a social network, including the School's Workvivo pages. All references to 'students' throughout this policy should be read as including apprentices.

3. It extends to students' use of social media in a personal capacity, where this impacts the School, its students, staff or the wider community. Furthermore, it outlines the responsibilities of students who use social media associated with any area of the School, including the Students' Union or any Club, Society or Group.

4. The policy does not cover social media usage by School staff, which is covered in a separate policy.

5. Social media channels covered by this policy include, but are not limited to, Workvivo, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn, YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram, Pinterest, Weibo, Youku, blogging platforms, online forums and review sites. It does not include the hosting and management of personal websites.

6. This Policy also extends to the use of the chat function in all conferencing software such as Zoom, MS Teams etc., whether these are used in a scheduled teaching and learning session or for communication between students when collaborating at other times. The recording function in conferencing software means that the contents of a 'chat' remain available after the session has closed and form part of the enduring record.

7. This policy applies to social media communications made both on public and private forums by students including those communications which directly or indirectly reference the School. It applies to social media from anywhere including off site and on personal devices whether to an individual, group or the world. While posts added to public forums can be seen by any member of the public from the date of publication, students are asked to remember that posts added to private forums (including private messages between two parties) can also be shared publicly by others.

8. Students may be subjected to disciplinary action where they have been careless or reckless in the communication they have posted, *even when they believe the forum to be private.* There have been a number of high-profile cases in recent years where students across the country have been disciplined after offensive comments, made on private messaging services such as WhatsApp, were captured and subsequently shared. With this in mind, students should remember that action can be taken by the School if behaviour failing to meet the School's expected standards is identified either publicly or privately.

Definitions

9. This policy adopts the definition of social media provided by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR): "The term commonly given to internet and mobile-based channels and tools that allow users to interact with each other and share opinions and content. It involves the building of communities or networks and encouraging participation and engagement".

Student Responsibilities (or Expected standards of behaviour)

10. 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. They shall also be deemed responsible for the actions of others (both within and outside the School community) who share content that they have posted.

11. Communications on social media must be respectful at all times and in accordance with this policy. Use of social media must not infringe on the rights, or privacy of other students, or staff and students must not make ill-considered comments or judgments about other students, staff or third parties.

12. Students must take particular care when communications through social media can identify them as a student of the School.

13. All use of social media must comply with the School's policies, including:
    - The Code of Conduct
    - The Student Misconduct Policy
    - The Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy
    - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
    - IT Acceptable Use Policy
    - Intellectual Property Policy

14. The following non-exhaustive list may, according to the circumstances, be considered to be of an unacceptable nature and should never be posted:
    (i) confidential and/or commercially sensitive information (which may include information not yet in the public domain, information about other students or staff or personnel matters, non-public or not yet approved documents or information);
    (ii) details of complaints and/or legal proceedings/potential legal proceedings involving the School;
    (iii) personal information about another individual, including contact information, without their express permission;

(iv) comments posted using fake accounts or using another person's name without their consent;

(v) material, including images, that is threatening, harassing, discriminatory, illegal, obscene, indecent, defamatory, or hostile towards any individual or entity, or amounts to a misuse of private information or breach of confidence;

(vi) any other posting that constitutes a criminal offence;

(vii) anything which may bring the School into disrepute or compromise the safety or reputation of colleagues, former colleagues, students, former students, staff, former staff, and those connected with the School.

15. If a student wishes to raise a concern to the School about any aspect of its provision, there are well-established ways for this to be done, including through the Student Complaints Policy and Procedure. Concerns must be raised through such procedures, not on social media.

Cyber Bullying

16. The School has zero tolerance to any form of bullying or harassment by students of members of staff, students or other members of the School community.

17. The following examples illustrate the types of behaviour, displayed through social media communications, which the School considers to be forms of cyber bullying:
    - maliciously spreading rumours, lies or gossip
    - intimidating or aggressive behaviour
    - offensive or threatening comments or content
    - posting private images of an individual without consent (including, but not limited to, private sexual images of an individual)
    - sharing unwanted images (including sexual images)
    - posting comments/photos etc. deliberately mocking an individual with the intent to harass or humiliate them
    - sending messages or posting comments with the intent to trick, force or pressure the receiver into doing something that they would not otherwise be comfortable doing (grooming)

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

19. Any student who is experiencing cyber bullying by another student or a member of staff, will have the full support of the School.

20. The Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy outlines the procedure to be followed, if a student feels they are being bullied, harassed or victimised.

Intellectual Property

21. All 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 via social media and, where sharing is permitted, should ensure that such materials or shared links are credited appropriately. In particular, students must not share School materials, including but not limited to production materials such as

rushes, lecture handouts, slides or recordings, by social media unless they have express permission to do so.

22. In addition, all students must check the terms and conditions of a social media account and/or website before uploading material to it; by posting material to social media accounts and/or websites, you may be releasing ownership rights and control of the content. For this reason, you must exercise caution in sharing any information.

23. Students who have a social media presence which refers to the School, or from which the School can be identified, should ensure it is clear they are speaking in a personal capacity. Students should not declare, imply or indicate that their content or views are representative of those of the School.

24. NOTE: The presence of a disclaimer will not necessarily mean that disciplinary action cannot be taken. The School may request the removal of content if it is deemed to pose a risk to the reputation of the School or to that of one of its staff/students.

25. The School prohibits using its logo(s) in on social network profile pictures, background images or cover photos, without the permission of the Director. It also prohibits the use of its name or within the account name or remit statement of a social network account, by individuals or organisations without the permission of the Director.

26. If you are approached by a media contact about content on a site relating to the School you should contact the Director before taking any action.

27. Please refer to the Intellectual Property Policy for further details.

Breaches of this Policy

28. In all cases where it is believed that this policy has been breached, considerable judgement will be exercised to consider the context behind the issue and the impact of the action, particularly when it impacts on the right to protest. However, please be aware that disparaging or untrue remarks which may bring the School, its staff or students into disrepute may constitute misconduct, and disciplinary action may be taken.

29. Where a breach of this policy is reported, the School will review the circumstances and decide on the most appropriate and proportionate course of action.

30. Where students are in receipt of any content considered to be in breach of this policy, this should be reported to the School as soon as possible, attaching any evidence available. Students can report any matters of concern falling under this policy to Student Wellbeing (Swellbeing@nfts.co.uk), the Registrar (Ewheal@nfts.co.uk) or to any manager.

Consequences of a breach of this policy

31. Any breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including exclusion/termination of registration.
32. Any disciplinary action will be taken in accordance with the procedures outlined in the Student Misconduct Policy and related policies.

33. Where conduct may be a criminal offence, the School may report the matter to the police. Beyond that, any member of staff, student or third party may pursue legal action against you, if they choose to do so.

This policy was approved by the Academic Standards Committee in April 2025

Annex A – How to use social media

Tips and hints on staying safe and managing your reputation

We all recognise the enormous benefits and opportunities that social media presents and we actively encourage our students to use social media to communicate and keep in touch with latest news and research in their area.

Despite the opportunities, there are risks. Social media allows individuals to communicate with a potentially large audience, and sometimes its informality can encourage us to be less cautious than we would ordinarily be.

These tips are to help you when you are considering posting on social media. They will help you manage your professional reputation and ensure you follow the School's guidelines and the law.

The IT Department are able to provide support and guidance for users of various social media technologies.

• Remember, everything you post online is public. Once it's out there you lose control of how others might interact with it. Posting anything online (even on closed profiles or private messaging services, like WhatsApp, for example) has the potential to become public, even without your knowledge or consent.

• Think before you post. It is important to realise that even the strictest privacy settings have limitations. Once something is online, it can be copied and redistributed. Would you be happy for your family, lecturer or future employer to see it? If not, then it's probably not a good idea to post it.

• Consider how the content of your messages may appear to others. Offensive materials, including text, images and video, have the potential to cause serious upset and severely damage your professional and personal reputation. Consider how others may perceive your content. How could a potential employer view the content? Employers are increasingly checking the digital footprint of potential Staff. This means looking at old tweets, posts and comments on forums. Will sharing the content result in you falling short of expected standards? If so, it could result in the School taking disciplinary action. Don't forget, it can be hard to take something back once it has been shared, copied, or redistributed.

• Check your privacy settings. Protect your personal information and that of others that could be misused. Think about who can see your address, telephone number, date of birth and email address. And, definitely don't share your bank details online. Also remember that while you may be sharing the content privately (on your own private profile or in a private forum) others can share that content publicly if it is available.

• Use Secure Passwords. Remember to use a secure password and current advice for this is to use a pass phrase of three or more words that you can picture in your head. Never reuse passwords across different websites. Where possible use second factor authentication methods, which may include sites sending an SMS or an authenticator app on your phone. For further information see https://www.getsafeonline.org/protecting-yourself/passwords/

• Make sure you familiarise yourself with expectations regarding professionalism and confidentiality on your course. If you breach expected professional standards, it is very likely to affect your ability to complete your course, and may affect your future career.

• Be aware of sharing third-party materials. Do you need permission to share the materials or should you, as a matter of courtesy, contact the party? Make sure you check before posting as infringement of rules could break copyright and/or intellectual property laws.

• Finally question everything you read online. Not everything you read might be completely accurate. Who wrote it? Where did it come from? Does the imagery look poor quality? If you think it looks or sounds inaccurate, it's probably best avoided. Writing and distributing inaccurate statements about people and organisations can be unlawful and lead to legal action.