Mulberry College of Teaching Social Media Policy

(to be accompanied with the Mulberry Schools Trust Staff Code of Conduct adopted by MCoT)

Approval Body:	Mulberry Schools Trust Board
Approval Date:	13.09.24
Implementation Date:	16.09.24
Review Date:	June 2027
Policy Version:	2

Policy update / revisions

Date	Updates / revisions
June 2025	No changes made.

Definitions

"Beginning Teachers" is used here to describe a prospective teacher who participates in the Mulberry College of Teaching (MCoT) Programme with the aim of achieving Qualified Teacher Status; <u>also known as a trainee or initial teacher trainee (ITT).</u>

"Social media" is used here to describe socially interactive, networked information and communication technologies by which personal information or opinions can be presented for public use on the Internet through websites and applications that concentrate on community based input, interaction, content-sharing, and collaboration. Examples include (but are not restricted to): blogs, micro-blogging, video sharing sites, image sharing sites, SMS text messaging, social networking sites, anonymous sharing apps, fitness trackers, location tracking services and commenting facilities within other online properties. These facilities are not restricted to specific types of devices and may allow interaction through PCs, laptops, netbooks, tablets, smartphone apps and any other internet-enabled devices.

"Online presence" is used here to describe any interactions that you have on the internet e.g., posting, commenting, or communicating through "social media", "Beginning Teachers" is used here to refer to enrolled Trainees at MCOT.

"You" and "your" are used here to refer to you as an individual and in your role as a "Beginning Teacher "of MCOT.

Introduction

Social media and popular sites including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn (not limited to) may form part of your communications with MCoT or be included within your course.

The widespread use of social media sites and tools has created an increased opportunity for media communications that have an impact upon you, as an individual, your academic life, your future profession and MCoT.

This policy will be reviewed annually but may require updates at any time under exceptional circumstances. Any changes will be communicated to all current Beginning Teachers usually by email. Annually this will be updated on the relevant area where all policies are stored.

MCoT staff and Beginning Teachers can access the latest version of this policy on MCoT Teams site, or a paper copy can be requested.

Aims and Objectives

The purpose of this social media Policy and associated guidelines is:

- to encourage good practice
- to protect MCoT, its staff, Beginning Teachers, partner organisations and clients
- to clarify where and how existing policies and guidelines apply to social media
- to promote effective and innovative use of social media as part of MCoT's activities

Scope

This policy applies to all Beginning Teachers enrolled at MCoT.

- It is your responsibility to read and act in accordance with the principles of this policy and associated guidelines and you should review any updates to these documents when notified of changes.
- It is your responsibility to read and act in accordance with the rules and guidelines set out by individual social media, social networking and website hosting companies, services, and providers.
- MCoT will ensure this policy and guidelines are accessible to staff and Beginning Teachers and incorporate in induction information. MCoT will periodically review and update the policy and guidelines and any other associated policy and guidelines. Staff and Beginning Teachers will be notified of any significant changes.
- MCoT reserves the right to monitor references to MCoT on the Internet and to investigate incidents that may breach this policy and the associated guidance.
- You must abide by MCoT's Trust Code of Conduct, and any Code of Conduct, Code of Ethics or guidance provided by the Professional Body that either funds or oversees your training and education. Breaches of these Codes of Conduct can affect your ability to progress to the next level of study and can adversely impact on your future career choices by affecting your suitability to gain professional accreditation.
- You must avoid bringing MCoT into disrepute in any way, as this may constitute a breach of the Beginning Teacher Code of Conduct.
- You must abide by the relevant Beginning Teacher Code of Conduct, Fitness to Practice and Fitness to Teach policies as provided by, or referred to within.
- You should not use your online presence in any way that may compromise your current or future fitness to practice.
- You must exercise caution when considering social interactions or personal engagement with staff, service users, Beginning Teachers, or parents from a placement setting. Inappropriate contact may breach the conditions of the Codes of Conduct or Fitness to Practice policies.
- You are advised to immediately notify the Director of MCoT and Tutor for clarification.
- You must not use your site to attack or abuse anyone and you should respect the privacy and the feelings of others at all times.
- You must not include contact details, pictures or other identifying information relating to members of staff, service users, or children without their prior permission.
- You should not include contact details, pictures or other identifying information relating to other Beginning Teachers where those Beginning Teachers do not want these details to be shared. If in doubt, always contact the Director of MCoT and Tutor for advice.

- Do not reveal confidential information about MCoT or its staff, Beginning Teachers, partner organisations or schools. This might include aspects of MCoT policy or details of either internal or private discussions.
- You must not directly respond to the press, or other type of media outlet, about any aspect of your course, your placement setting or MCoT without first seeking advice from the Director of MCoT. Where social media is utilised as part of a research study or project, all ethical considerations, and requirements of MCoT and any relevant external bodies should be adhered to.
- Any official Beginning Teacher social networking site/group must be approved by all MCoT Beginning Teachers registered on the course for that year. Any Beginning Teacher who withdraws from the course must be removed from a social group.
- If you already maintain an online presence or intend to initiate one; you should not declare, imply, or indicate that your posts, comments, or views are representative of the MCoT. This does not exclude you from offering your own views and personal opinions, but it is your responsibility to adhere to the Beginning Teachers' code of conduct. If you are in any doubt, you should discuss the content with the Director of MCoT. You may also want to include a simple and visible disclaimer such as "these are my personal views and not those of MCoT."
- If you think anything about your internet presence gives rise to concerns about a conflict of interest and in particular concerns about confidentiality this must be discussed immediately with the Director of MCoT.
- Remember that if you break the law on your site (for example by posting something defamatory or by breaching copyright laws through posting content own by another person or entity), you will be held personally responsible.

General guidelines for Beginning Teachers

- Beginning Teachers should take effective precautions when utilising social networking sites to ensure their own personal safety and to protect against identity theft.
- Any group which wishes to actively engage with students should seek the advice and approval of the Director of MCoT.
- Beginning Teachers need to consider intellectual property rights, copyright and ownership of data when using social media.
- Individuals should exercise caution when interacting with, and responding to, potentially contentious posts on social media sites.
- MCoT will continually review the use of social media and may modify its policies should the status of particular social media services or products change e.g., if charges are introduced, changes made to the way content is used, terms of use are changed, if a site closes or a new service begins.

Encouraged practice for official MCOT use

- Academic uses – MCoT recognises that social media has the potential to support and advance learning opportunities and encourages its use in this way. Where existing

supported learning technologies offer equivalent functionality e.g., Teams, consideration will be given to the most effective medium.

- Collaborative uses – MCoT supports both internal and external collaboration and acknowledges that social media can provide opportunities to support this work.
- Communications and External Relations uses – MCoT recognises the opportunity to communicate with prospective and existing customers through social media.
- Beginning Teachers uses – prospective and existing Beginning Teachers, along with others who have an interest in MCoT, are active in social media, e.g., setting up Facebook groups, LinkedIn and blogging. Possible responses to any contentious issues identified in unofficial social media sites should be referred to a senior leader.

Other potential uses

- It is not the intention of MCoT to actively monitor beginning teachers' personal social media activity. Action may be taken, and social media content reviewed, in circumstances where a breach of policy or abuse is alleged, but individual beginning teachers' privacy will be respected in compliance with MCoT's Data Protection Policy.
- MCoT will not refer to social networking sites when assessing student applications and job applications unless such sites are specifically highlighted in the application. MCOT will assess all applications only on the information provided. A media check may be carried out if successful in your application.
- MCoT may refer to social networking sites when investigating breaches of discipline,

  e.g., cheating, harassment, anti-social behaviour.

- MCoT may monitor forums and blogs to gain indirect feedback on MCoT services and facilities. MCoT may post replies on forums or blogs to answer queries or address factual corrections but would take a cautious approach before getting involved in contentious issues.
- MCoT reserves the right to take any necessary steps to protect its facilities, staff, and Beginning Teachers from malware (malicious software) including blocking sites where this is an issue.
- If a complaint is received that a school student or colleague is being bullied or harassed, then actions may be taken via appropriate procedures.

Disability Discrimination, Equality of Opportunity and quality and Diversity Impact Assessment Statements.

- The Equality Act 2010 covers the "protected characteristics" of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion,

  or belief (including lack of belief), sex and sexual orientation.

- Within the Equality Act it remains permissible to treat a disabled person more favourably than a non-disabled person. It remains lawful to make reasonable adjustments in relation to employment, education, and services to ensure that there is true equality of opportunity for disabled people.

- This policy and its implementation will be monitored, as appropriate, in line with relevant legislation for its impact on different equality groups.
- MCOT is committed to complying with the requirements of Data Protection legislation and regulations and any personal data created as part of this policy will be processed in accordance with MCOT's Data Protection Act procedures. This includes ensuring that data is held securely, is not disclosed unlawfully, and is destroyed when no longer needed.
- MCOT also aims to ensure that users of this policy are aware of Data Protection, Freedom of Information and Records Management issues associated with this policy.

PREVENT Duties

MCoT has a legal responsibility in relation to the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 and the Prevent Statutory Duty, incorporated into MCoT's wider safeguarding and wellbeing responsibilities and commitments to its Beginning Teachers and staff. Concerns that Beginning Teachers may be in breach of this legislation may be dealt with through existing Safeguarding mechanisms and/or the Beginning Teacher Progress Review/Student Code of Conduct and may be referred to relevant external bodies such as the Police.

Risk Management Statement

As a Beginning teacher, responsible and ethical social media use is essential to maintain professionalism, safeguard personal and professional reputation, and protect the wellbeing of students and colleagues.

Failure to comply with this policy could lead to:

- MCoT being brought into disrepute
- Beginning Teachers contravening the Trust Code of Conduct
- Inappropriate posts online or Cyber Bullying leading to Beginning Teacher compromising their programme, professional accreditation, and employment outcomes and, in worse case scenarios, Beginning Teachers facing legal action
- Failure to comply in one of more areas of legislative, regulatory, and contractual compliance/obligation leading to negative financial and/or reputational consequences and impacting on the achievement of institutional or operational objectives
- Beginning Teachers being barred from teaching or working in education

Roles and Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of:

- MCoT Board to oversee the Policy via Governance structures.
- Staff members to be aware of Beginning Teacher social media Policy
- Beginning Teachers to adhere to the Policy and seek necessary permissions and guidance as found in the Policy.