

## **Social Networking Policy**

### **Social Networking Policy - learners**

#### **Overview**

Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are widely used today, offering new ways to communicate that can positively enhance engagement. Stanfords Training recognizes that most stakeholders use these platforms responsibly and positively. However, for a minority, such sites can be misused to express negative or offensive views about the training provider, staff, or awarding organisations, instead of following the appropriate internal feedback or complaints procedures where such issues can be resolved professionally. This document outlines Stanfords Training's approach to learners' use of social networking sites, procedures for addressing inappropriate use, and potential actions that may be taken in response to misuse.

Stanfords Training recognises that the responsible use of social networking and online communication platforms can support engagement, communication, and professional development. However, misuse can breach data protection laws (UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018), safeguarding standards, and awarding body codes of conduct. Therefore, this policy applies to all learners, staff, contractors, and associates who interact online in any way connected to Stanfords Training.

#### **Objectives**

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Promote the beneficial and constructive use of social networking sites by learners.
- Protect learners, staff, and others associated with the provider from the negative impacts of social networking sites.
- Safeguard the reputation of Stanfords Training from unwarranted abuse on social networking sites.
- Define what is considered appropriate and inappropriate use of social networking sites by learners.
- Detail the procedures Stanfords Training will follow and the actions it may take if learners misuse social networking sites.
- Ensure compliance with UK GDPR, Data Protection Act 2018, Prevent Duty (2015), Equality Act 2010, and the safeguarding expectations of Ofqual-regulated awarding organisations.

#### **Appropriate use of social networking sites by learners**

Social networking sites can enhance learning and achievement by providing accessible information and efficient feedback mechanisms. Stanfords Training acknowledges that learners may use personal social networking accounts to discuss or share views about the provider. Before posting any information about Stanfords, its staff, learners, or anyone associated with it, individuals should consider the following:

- Is the social networking site the appropriate channel to raise concerns, give this feedback or express these views?

- Would private and confidential discussions with Stanfords Training be more appropriate? E.g. if there are serious allegations being made/concerns being raised. Social media/internet sites should not be used to name individuals and make abusive comments about those people. Please contact Stanfords Training to discuss any concerns you may have.
- Are such comments likely to cause emotional or reputational harm to individuals which would not be justified, particularly if Stanfords Training has not yet had a chance to investigate a complaint?
- The reputational impact that the posting of such material may have to Stanfords; any detrimental harm that the Stanfords Training may suffer because of the posting; and the impact that such a posting may have on learners learning.
- Learners must not post or share screenshots, recordings, or learning materials obtained during training sessions or assessments, except where authorised by Stanfords Training for educational use.
- Learners should also avoid participating in group chats or online discussions that could lead to unprofessional or discriminatory language, in accordance with the Equality and Diversity Policy.

#### **Inappropriate use of social networking sites by learners**

Misuse of social media can amount to misconduct under the Learner Disciplinary Policy and may also breach UK law, including defamation, harassment, or hate crime legislation. Although social networking sites may seem like a quick and easy way to express frustrations or concerns, it is inappropriate to use them for such purposes. Concerns should be raised through the appropriate channels, such as speaking directly with teaching assessors, staff, in accordance with the Complaints Policy

Stanfords Training considers the following examples to be inappropriate uses of social networking sites. (This list is non-exhaustive and intended to provide examples only):

- Making allegations about staff or learners at Stanfords or cyber-bullying;
- Making complaints or negative statements about the training provider, staff, assessors, or learners at Stanfords through social media channels, rather than using the official Complaints Procedure.
- Making defamatory statements about Stanfords Training or staff at Stanfords
- Posting negative/offensive comments about specific learners/staff at Stanfords
- Posting racist comments;
- Posting comments which threaten violence.

#### **Procedure for Addressing Continued Inappropriate Use**

If any Learner at Stanfords Training is found to be posting libellous or defamatory comments on Facebook or other social network sites, they will be reported to the appropriate 'report abuse' section of the network site. All social network sites have clear rules about the content which can be posted on the site and they provide robust mechanisms to report contact or activity which breaches

this. The provider will also expect that any learner removes such comments immediately and will be asked to attend a meeting with a member of management to discuss the breaking of Stanfords Agreement and the possible repercussions of such action.

If a learner refuses to comply with these procedures and continues to use social networking sites in a manner Stanfords considers inappropriate, the provider will consider taking the following action:

- Take legal advice and/or legal action where the information posted is defamatory in any way or if the circumstances warrant this.
- Set out the providers concerns to you in writing, giving you a warning and requesting that the material in question is removed.
- Contact the Police where the provider feels it appropriate – for example, if it considers a crime (such as harassment) has been committed; or in cases where the posting has a racial element, is considered to be grossly obscene or is threatening violence.
- If the inappropriate comments have been made on a provider forum, Stanfords may take action to block or restrict that individual's access to that website or forum.
- Contact the host/provider of the Social Networking site to complain about the content of the site and ask for removal of the information;
- Take other legal action against the individual.

Where online behaviour may breach awarding body regulations (for example, sharing assessment content or defaming an awarding body or examiner), Stanfords Training will report this to the relevant awarding body in accordance with its Malpractice and Maladministration Policy.

### **Social Networking Policy – Staff**

\*In the context of this policy “everyone” refers to members of staff, friends and anyone working in a voluntary capacity at Stanfords.

#### **Introduction**

Social networking activities conducted online outside work, such as blogging (writing personal journals to publicly accessible internet pages), involvement in social networking sites such as Facebook and posting material, images, or comments on sites such as You Tube can have a negative effect on an organisation's reputation or image. In addition, Stanfords Training has a firm commitment to safeguarding Learners and expects all trustees, friends, and volunteers, staff, contractors, associates and visiting assessors to adhere to key principles and a code of conduct when using social networking sites.

#### **Key Principles**

- Everyone at Stanfords Training has a responsibility to ensure that they protect the reputation of Stanfords and to treat all colleagues with professionalism and respect.
- It is important to protect everyone at Stanfords from allegations and misinterpretations which can arise from the use of social networking sites.

- Safeguarding learners is a key responsibility of all members of staff, and it is essential that everyone at Stanfords considers this and acts responsibly if they are using social networking sites outside of Stanfords. Anyone working with the provider either as a paid employee or volunteer must not communicate with learners and ex-learners via social networking and must not accept or initiate Facebook or any other social networking friend requests from learners and ex-learners enrolled at Stanfords.
- This policy relates to social networking outside work. Accessing social networking sites at work using Stanfords equipment is not permitted unless it is being used by designated staff publicity or promotion.

### **Aims**

- To set out the key principles and code of conduct expected of all members of trustees, friends and volunteers, staff, contractors, associates and visiting assessors at Stanfords in respect to social networking.
- To further safeguard and protect learners and staff.

### **Code of Conduct for Social Networking**

The following are not considered acceptable at Stanfords Training:

- The sharing of awarding body assessment materials, answers, or feedback outside of authorised channels, including screenshots or descriptions of examination or assignment content.
- The use of the providers name, logo, or any other published material without written prior permission from management. This applies to any published material including the internet or written documentation.
- The posting of any communication or images which links the provider to any form of illegal conduct, or which may damage its reputation. This includes defamatory comments.
- The disclosure of confidential or business-sensitive information; or the disclosure of information or images that could compromise the security of the provider.
- The posting of any images of employees, learners or anyone directly connected with the provider whilst engaged in Stanfords activities except by a designated person for agreed publicity use.

Staff must also comply with the Stanfords Data Protection Policy and Safeguarding Policy when posting or engaging online. Any breach involving confidential information, learner data, or online safeguarding concerns will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter and may be reportable to the awarding body or regulatory authorities.

**In addition to the above everyone at Stanfords Training must ensure that they:**

- Do not make any derogatory, defamatory, rude, threatening, or inappropriate comments about the Stanfords Training, or anyone at or connected with the provider.
- Use social networking sites responsibly and ensure that neither their personal/ professional reputation, or the Stanfords Training's reputation is compromised by inappropriate postings.

- Are aware of the potential of on-line identity fraud and to be cautious when giving out personal information about themselves which may compromise their personal safety and security.
- Communication between learners and adults should take place within clear and explicit professional boundaries.
- Should not share any personal information with a learner or young person.
- All communications are transparent and open to scrutiny.
- Personal contact details including email, home or mobile numbers should not be given unless the need to do so is agreed by management.
- Ensure that personal social networking sites are set to Private, and learners are never listed as approved contacts.
- Never use or access social networking sites of learners
- Not give their personal contact details to learners, including their mobile telephone number
- Not use internal or web-based communication channels to send personal messages to a learner.
- It is strongly recommended that Facebook friend requests not be initiated to or accepted from staff.

#### **Potential and Actual Breaches of the Code of Conduct**

In instances where there has been a breach of the above Code of Conduct, the following will apply:

- Any breaches of this policy will be fully investigated. Where it is found that there has been a breach of the policy this may result in action being taken under the Disciplinary Procedure. A breach of this policy will be considered to be a serious disciplinary offence which is also contrary to the provider's ethos and principles.
- Where a breach involves an awarding body or regulated qualification, Stanfords Training will follow the awarding body's Malpractice Policy and report the issue in line with regulatory requirements.

**Effective Date:** 01/11/2025

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Signed: