

## **Personal use of social networking and other third party websites (including blogs, microblogs and personal web-space)**

*This guidance note should be read in conjunction with [BBC Editorial Guidelines](#), the [BBC Conflict of Interest Guidelines](#) and the Guidance Note on [Off-Air Activities](#).*

*In cases of doubt, further assistance can be sought from the duty Editorial Policy Adviser by telephoning 0370 333 4550 or BBC extension (02) 81819.*

*All Guidance Notes can be found on [Gateway](#) (BBC internal link) and on [bbc.co.uk](#).*

*This Guidance Note relates to personal use of the internet. For guidance on BBC content which uses social networking sites please see the Guidance Note on [BBC use of social networking and other third party websites](#).*

### **Introduction**

The Internet provides a number of benefits in which BBC staff may wish to participate. From rediscovering old school friends on *Facebook* to keeping up with other people's daily lives on *Twitter* or helping to maintain open access online encyclopaedias such as *Wikipedia*.

However, when someone clearly identifies their association with the BBC and/or discusses their work, they are expected to behave appropriately when on the Internet, and in ways that are consistent with the BBC's editorial values and policies.

This editorial guidance note sets out the principles which BBC staff are expected to follow when using the Internet and gives interpretations for current forms of interactivity. It applies to blogs, to microblogs like *Twitter* and to other personal web-space. The Internet is a fast moving technology and it is impossible to cover all circumstances. However, the principles set out in this document should always be followed.

The intention of this note is not to stop BBC staff from conducting legitimate activities on the Internet, but serves to flag-up those areas in which conflicts can arise.

### **1. Principles**

The BBC's reputation for impartiality and objectivity is crucial. The public must be able to trust the integrity of BBC programmes and services. Our audiences need to be confident that the outside activities of our presenters, programme makers and other staff do not undermine the BBC's impartiality or reputation and that editorial decisions are not perceived to be influenced by any commercial or personal interests.

To this end when identified<sup>1</sup> as a BBC staff member<sup>2</sup> or BBC talent, people:

- Should not engage in activities on the Internet which might bring the BBC into disrepute.
- Should act in a transparent manner when altering online sources of information.
- Should not use the Internet in any way to attack or abuse colleagues.
- Should not post derogatory or offensive comments on the Internet.

Even if they are not identified as a BBC staff member, editorial staff and staff in politically sensitive areas should not be seen to support any political party or cause.

Any online activities associated with work for the BBC should be discussed and approved in advance by a line manager.

## **2. Hybrid sites**

It should be clear to users whether the site they are interacting with is a BBC page run by the BBC for BBC purposes or whether this is a personal page run by an individual for their own purposes.

We should avoid creating or endorsing “hybrid” sites which contain elements of both and which are likely to cause confusion, editorial problems and brand damage. For example, a presenter’s personal profile should not have a URL or username or avatar which contains a BBC brand or programme name.

For guidance on BBC use of third party sites, see the Guidance Note on [BBC use of social networking and other third party websites](#).

## **3. Social Networking Sites**

Social networking sites provide a great way for people to maintain contact with friends. However, through the open nature of such sites, it is also possible for third parties to collate vast amounts of information.

For example, *The Shawshank Redemption* was the most popular film amongst the 11,899 members of the BBC network on *Facebook* in February 2008 and 8% listed their political views as “liberal”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For example, at its most obvious, by displaying an [@bbc.co.uk](mailto:@bbc.co.uk) e-mail address or by joining the BBC Network on *Facebook* (which displays the words “British Broadcasting Corporation” after the person’s name

<sup>2</sup> Editorial staff includes any member of staff who may influence our editorial output from Researchers in News and Current Affairs or factual programming to members of the Executive Board

All BBC staff should be mindful of the information they disclose on social networking sites. Where they associate themselves with the Corporation (through providing work details or joining a BBC network) they should act in a manner which does not bring the BBC into disrepute.

When a staff member is contacted by the press about posts on their social networking site that relate to the BBC they should talk to their manager before responding. The relevant BBC press office must be consulted.

### **3.1 Political Activities on Social Networking sites**

Editorial staff and staff in politically sensitive areas should never indicate a political allegiance on social networking sites, either through profile information or through joining political groups. This is particularly important for all staff in News and Current Affairs, Nations and Regions and factual programming and applies regardless of whether they indicate that they are employed by the BBC or not.

Any rare exception to this must be agreed in advance by a line manager. For instance, it may be appropriate to join *Facebook* groups related to political causes for reasons of political research. Where this is agreed we should be transparent and should consider how membership of the group can be balanced.

*For example, if a Political Correspondent were to join the Facebook group “Labour History” it may also be appropriate also to join “Conservative History” and the equivalents for the Liberal Democrats and the Nationalists. In such circumstance, the specific post held at the BBC should be given in the work details on the Facebook profile.*

Editorial staff and staff in politically sensitive areas should also be careful about joining campaigning groups. They should discuss this in advance with their line-manager.

Non-Editorial Staff are free to engage in political activity, in line with the [BBC Conflicts of Interest Guidelines](#). However, on social networking sites, when they identify themselves as BBC staff members they must make clear that they are not a member of editorial staff. This can be achieved by stating the position (or type of position) they hold at the BBC in their work details. If non-Editorial Staff associate themselves with the BBC and do not make clear they have no editorial input then this could give rise to questions about the Corporation’s impartiality.

### **3.2 Consideration towards other members of staff when using social networking sites**

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<sup>3</sup> Information from [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) on 25 February 2008

Social networking sites allow photographs, videos and comments to be shared with thousands of other users. However, it may not be appropriate to share work-related information in this way.

For example, there may be an expectation that photographs taken at a private BBC event will not appear publicly on the Internet, both from those present and perhaps those not at the event. Or the BBC may have objections. Staff should be considerate to their colleague in such circumstance and should not post information when they have been asked not to. They should also remove information about a colleague if that colleague asks them to do so.

Under no circumstance should offensive comments be made about BBC colleagues on the Internet. This may amount to cyber-bullying and could be deemed a disciplinary offence.

#### **4. Open access online encyclopaedias**

In the course of BBC work, staff may find errors in online encyclopaedias.

If staff members edit online encyclopaedias at work the source of the correction will be recorded as a BBC IP address. The intervention may therefore look as if it comes from the BBC itself. BBC staff should therefore act in a manner that does not bring the BBC into disrepute and should not post derogatory or offensive comments on any online encyclopaedias.

When correcting errors about the BBC, we should be transparent about who we are. We should never remove criticism of the BBC. Instead, we should respond to legitimate criticism. We should not remove derogatory or offensive comments but must report them to the relevant administrators for them to take action.

Before editing an online encyclopaedia entry about the BBC, or any entry which might be deemed a conflict of interest, BBC staff should consult the house rules of the site concerned and, if necessary, ask permission from the relevant wikieditor. They may also need to seek advice from their line manager.

#### **5. Blogging and microblogging**

Many bloggers, particularly in technical areas, use their personal blogs, and increasingly their microblogs like *Twitter*, to discuss their BBC work in ways that benefit the BBC, and add to the “industry conversation”.

This editorial guidance note is not intended to restrict this, as long as confidential information is not revealed.

Blogs, microblogs or other personal websites which do not identify the blogger as a BBC employee, do not discuss the BBC and are purely about personal matters would normally fall outside this guidance.

Staff members who already have a personal blog, microblog or website which indicates in any way that they work at the BBC should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with their line manager.

Similarly, staff members who want to start blogging or microblogging, and wish to say that they work for the BBC, should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with their line manager.

If a blog makes it clear that the author works for the BBC, it should include a simple and visible disclaimer such as “these are my personal views and not those of the BBC”.

Unless there are specific concerns about the nature of their role (for instance because they are a member of editorial staff), staff members are free to talk about BBC programmes and content on their blogs or microblogs. If in doubt, staff members should consult their line manager.

Personal blogs, microblogs and websites should not reveal confidential information about the BBC. This might include aspects of BBC policy or details of internal BBC discussions. If in doubt about what might be confidential, staff members should consult their line manager.

Personal blogs, microblogs and websites should not be used to attack or abuse colleagues. Staff members should respect the privacy and the feelings of others. Remember also that if they break the law on a blog or microblog (for example by posting something defamatory), they will be personally responsible.

If a staff member thinks something on their blog, microblog or website gives rise to concerns about a conflict of interest, and in particular concerns about impartiality or confidentiality, this must be discussed with their line manager.

If a staff member is offered payment to produce a blog or microblog for a third party this could constitute a conflict of interest and must be discussed with their line manager.

When a staff member is contacted by the press about posts on their blog or tweets on their microblog that relate to the BBC they should talk to their line manager before responding. The relevant BBC press office must be consulted.

Staff members are allowed to update their personal blog or microblog from a BBC computer at work, under the BBC’s [Acceptable Use Policy for Internet and Email](#).

### **5.1 Guidance for Managers on blogging and microblogging**

Under this Guidance Note, managers in each area will decide what is appropriate. They should not adopt an unnecessarily restrictive approach. Managers should ensure that any special instructions on blogging or microblogging are reasonable and explained clearly to staff.

Managers should bear in mind concerns about impartiality, confidentiality, conflicts of interest or commercial sensitivity. In some cases individuals may be dealing with matters which are so sensitive that rules may have to be set on what they can and cannot talk about on their personal blog or microblog.

Those involved in editorial or production areas must take particular care to ensure that they do not undermine the integrity or impartiality of the BBC or its output on their blogs or microblogs. For example those involved in News and Current Affairs or factual programming should not advocate a particular position on high profile controversial subjects relevant to their areas.

Managers can consult the BBC's [Conflicts of Interest Guidelines](#) and the BBC's [Acceptable Use Policy for Internet and Email](#).

## **5.2 News and Current Affairs staff, blogging and microblogging**

Impartiality is a particular concern for those working in News and Current Affairs. Nothing should appear on their personal blogs or microblogs which undermines the integrity or impartiality of the BBC. For example, News and Current Affairs staff should not:

- advocate support for a particular political party
- express views for or against any policy which is a matter of current party political debate
- advocate any particular position on an issue of current public controversy or debate

If News and Current Affairs staff are in doubt, they should refer immediately to their line manager.

If News and Current Affairs staff are asked to blog or tweet for commercial gain this could constitute a conflict of interest. Managers should consult the Guidance Note on [Off Air Activities for Presenters and Editorial Staff in BBC News, Global News and Nations and Regions](#).

**This Editorial Policy Guidance Note was first produced on 11 March 2008 and reissued in revised form on 16 February 2010.**

**It supersedes the Guidance Note on Employees Personal Weblogs and Websites.**