

# Editorial Policy



## Guidance Note

### Personal use of social networking and other third party websites (including blogging 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 0870 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 or blogging formats 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* or *Friends Reunited* 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. 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 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<sup>2</sup> 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 always 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 private purposes.

We should avoid creating or endorsing "hybrid" sites which contain elements of both as this is likely to cause confusion, editorial problems and brand damage. For example, a presenter's personal profile should not have a URL 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.

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<sup>1</sup> For example by displaying an @bbc.co.uk e-mail address or by joining the BBC Network on *Facebook* (which displays the words "British Broadcasting Corporation" after the persons 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

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

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.

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

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

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**

Many bloggers, particularly in technical areas, use their personal blogs 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 or 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 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, 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. If in doubt, staff members should consult their line manager.

Personal blogs 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 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 (for example by posting something defamatory), they will be personally responsible.

If a staff member thinks something on their blog 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 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 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 from a BBC computer at work, under the BBC's [Acceptable Use Policy for Internet and Email](#).

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

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 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.

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. 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 and blogging**

Impartiality is a particular concern for those working in News and Current Affairs. Nothing should appear on their personal blogs 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 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. It supersedes the Guidance Note on Employees Personal Weblogs and Websites.**

# Editorial Policy



## Guidance Note

### **BBC use of social networking and other third party websites**

*This guidance note should be read in conjunction with [BBC Editorial Guidelines](#) and the [BBC Online Editorial Guidelines](#).*

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

*This guidance note relates to BBC use of social networking and other third party websites. For guidance on personal use of social networking sites or blogging formats please see the guidance note on [Personal use of social networking and other third party websites](#).*

### **Introduction**

This guidance is intended to help BBC producers implement the BBC Share strategy on social networking sites. The strategy relies on the BBC engaging with users on the sites where they go, in the conversations they are having, off [bbc.co.uk](#) as much as on [bbc.co.uk](#), in part so that users who may consume little or no BBC content can discover for themselves and enjoy more of what we have to offer. See [Internal BBC wiki](#).

It assumes that within this framework for engagement, a flexible approach is necessary, as social networking sites continue to evolve and as we learn what approaches work best in different places.

The guidance complements the BBC Share Strategy principles, including the following

- With conversations, participate online; don't "broadcast" messages to users
- With moderation, only police where we have to; trust our users where we don't

## **1. Scope**

This guidance is primarily designed to cover informal BBC presences on third party social networking sites. These are most likely to be BBC branded but they may simply be set up by the BBC to pursue our public purposes. The guidance is not primarily designed to cover formal BBC partnerships on social networking sites eg *YouTube* and *Bebo* although some of the guidance will be relevant and useful in these circumstances.

It is not intended to apply to sites which are set up and run by users to talk about BBC content or talent.

Where the BBC already has a formal partnership, producers should normally see if the available BBC channel fits their editorial purpose before creating their own site.

## **2. Hybrid sites**

It should always 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 private purposes.

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

For guidance on personal sites of BBC staff and BBC talent, see the guidance note on [Personal use of social networking and other third party website](#).

## **3. Editorial Purpose**

Discuss what you want to do first with the relevant Interactive Editor or senior editorial figure, and the relevant Head of Marketing

- What is the editorial purpose? How does this fit in with your overall editorial and marketing strategy?
- Could you achieve the same effect or better on [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk)?
- Does the site appeal to a key demographic not available via [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk)? Is this the right site to engage with your audiences?
- Does anything similar already exist? If it does, would working with an existing presence be better for users and for the BBC?
- What commitment are you willing to make to the site? Do you have the resources you need to keep it refreshed and relevant? For how long?

- What is your exit strategy?
- How will you measure success? Try to set a target and a review point before you launch
- Is your overall investment in time and/or money likely to be worth the benefit the offshore presence is likely to deliver?
- The relevant Interactive Editor/senior editorial figure will nominate a named editorial owner for the page. They will be responsible for maintaining and refreshing it
- The relevant Social Media Group representative for each Division will have overall responsibility for keeping a record of any informal pages/profiles/sites set up by their teams on third party social networking sites

#### **4. Use of the BBC Brand**

You can put the brand/logo of your network, programme or event on a third party site. This has the advantage of transparency. Remember that a BBC logo is intended to give the impression that this is a genuine, authorised, BBC presence so the nature of that presence should reflect credit on the brand.

- Any logos should contain links back to the relevant page on [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk)
- If you have a query about the correct use of the BBC's brands, ask the relevant Head of Marketing who may consult the Head of Brand Guardianship

If you do not use a logo, it should be clear to users that they are interacting with a BBC page run by the BBC.

#### **5. Content syndication**

This guidance does not deal with what forms of content you can upload to your page/profile. For advice in this area, see the [Syndication Guidelines](#). If in doubt, refer to Controller, Business Development, FM&T.

#### **6. Social Media Group**

New kinds of informal activity on third party sites will need to be discussed by the Social Media Group in FM&T. Interactive Editors/senior editorial figures should consult their Divisional Representative for more details. One reason for this is to manage risk; another is to share valuable new experience across the Divisions.

## **7. Tone of voice**

We should be sensitive to the expectations of existing users of the specific site. If we add a BBC presence, we are joining their site rather than the opposite. Users are likely to feel that they already have a significant stake in it. When adding an informal BBC presence, we should “go with the grain” and be sensitive to user customs and conventions to avoid giving the impression that the BBC is imposing itself on them and their space.

For example, we should respect the fact that users on site X are not our users; they are not bound by the same Terms of Use and House Rules as we apply on [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk). Attempts to enforce our standard community rules on third party sites may lead to resentment, criticism and in some cases outright hostility to the BBC's presence.

This is not to say that behaviour likely to cause extreme offence, for example racist insults, should be tolerated by the BBC on a BBC branded space on a social networking site. It should not. Neither should behaviour which is clearly likely to put a child or teenager at substantial risk of significant harm. But where we do decide to intervene, we will normally need to do so with a light touch, sensitive to different expectations and a different context from [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk).

## **8. Level of engagement**

Before the page/profile/site is launched, you will need to decide with the relevant Interactive Editor/senior editorial figure what level of engagement you want, what resources you will need to achieve it and over what period of time.

For example, a page which advertises forthcoming editions of a TV programme with clips and some background information will need regular refreshing.

But you may want to offer a higher level of user engagement on the BBC branded space.

For example,

- Will users be able to upload still, audio or video contributions? *See also **Legal and Rights Issues** below*
- Will users be able to add their own text comments?

If so,

- How do you plan to engage with the community? Will you offer a host presence, for example to answer a question about when the next series is starting?

- How do you plan to protect the BBC brand? Will you need to consider some additional moderation?
- Do you have the necessary resources to do the job properly?

## **9. Presumption against taking over responsibility on third party sites**

The responsibility for measures of protection and intervention lies first with the social networking site itself. We should never set out to duplicate measures of protection and intervention which the social networking site already takes eg against illegal or against harmful and offensive content, whether by using its own staff or by working with the community to alert them to breaches of the site's terms and conditions.

In practice, different social networking sites offer different models of intervention in different areas.

For example, the photo sharing site *Flickr* has worked with its users to moderate the most offensive images itself quite effectively. But it does not appear to offer its own user facing mechanism for removing the most offensive user comments. Instead, *Flickr* gives the right to moderate and comment on user text comments to the Administrator of each Group. BBC producers have used this facility to actively host BBC Groups and to remove some comments.

So there are some circumstances where the BBC will need to plan and implement an additional “light touch” intervention, for example to remove comments which are likely to cause extreme offence. We will need to work out how this should be done, who will do it and when. Where necessary, Editorial Policy can advise on a suitable threshold for “light touch” intervention. Recent research suggests that this approach matches audience expectations.

One problem is that while social networking sites may publish clear rules of acceptable behaviour for their users, they are often very reluctant to share much information about how they intervene or to what level. If you are not familiar with how eg *MySpace*, *Facebook* and *Bebo* deal in practice with different forms of harmful and illegal content on their sites, ask the Central Communities Team in FM&T.

## **10. Friends**

You may wish to make “friends” on a third party web page. But remember that approving a “friend” may make other users of a site think they are more trustworthy.

Check all friends carefully before you approve them. Look at their profiles first. If you have any doubts about whether you should approve a friend, discuss it with your Interactive Editor/senior editorial figure.

Review “friends” comments regularly and remove (or do not post) any which exceed the appropriate threshold.

If you want to update your list of “friends” with a regular newsletter, make sure they are happy to receive it. Only use the list for activities on the same site or you may be in breach of the Data Protection Act.

If you want to make “friends” with an organisation (eg a company or a political campaign), consult your Interactive Editor/senior editorial figure first. Remember that this is likely to give the impression that the BBC is endorsing the organisation.

Once accepted, some group “friends” have changed from an innocuous group into porn or gambling spammers, so these are worth keeping an eye on.

## **11. Working with the community**

We should take care not to give users the impression that we are interested in setting up a fully interactive profile or page if that page is then neglected or abandoned after it has achieved a one-off short term purpose. This is particularly true if a community of interest has formed around the page or profile. It may be possible to hand a limited-life BBC page or profile over to the community which has grown around it, after a broadcast-led engagement has come to an end. This needs thinking about before the page is created. It may then become necessary to remove some or all of the BBC branding. It may also be useful to add a disclaimer to the effect that this site was created by the BBC but is now being run by the community. See also **Site Closure** below

## **12. Advertising for contributors**

Any proposal to use a chat room, message board or social networking site to find contributors must be referred to the relevant Divisional representative or for independents to the commissioning editor.

The proposed wording of all written adverts must be referred to the same person.

The main reason for this is that there are risks in advertising for contributors whether using posters or personal adverts in newspapers, specialist publications, or the internet. The people who reply are self-selecting and may seek to appear regularly as “serial guests”. We need to screen out those who are unsuitable or dishonest and those prone to exaggeration.

We should only advertise for contributors to factual and factual entertainment programmes as a last resort when other research methods have been exhausted. When we do use adverts, we must word them carefully to avoid bringing the BBC into disrepute.

It may be appropriate for entertainment programmes to advertise for contestants and audiences. Even then all appropriate checks should be made to screen out unsuitable or untruthful contributors.

See also [Editorial Guidelines, Section 3 – Advertising for Contributors](#).

### **13. Content Labelling**

Very strong BBC content, or very strong user generated content inspired by a BBC call to action, may require a short content label. This applies the same principle as on [bbc.co.uk](#) that users should be able to take an informed decision about what content they wish to consume before they do so. But as user expectations on third party sites are likely to be different, the threshold for requiring a content label is likely to be higher.

### **14. Linking Strategy**

The BBC Share strategy relies on the BBC engaging with users on the sites where they go, in the conversations they are having, as well as on [bbc.co.uk](#). This is partly so that users who may consume little or no BBC content can discover for themselves more of what we have to offer. So we should always link back to [bbc.co.uk](#). We can then encourage users to consume more BBC content on our site, for example by accessing long form video content on BBC iPlayer.

It is not an integral part of the Share strategy that we should routinely link from [bbc.co.uk](#) to any BBC presence on a social networking site. It is not our job to promote or advertise these sites from [bbc.co.uk](#) or on air. On air, we only trail BBC URLs. See [BBC Credits Guidelines](#)

Links to social networking sites should be clearly editorially justifiable, as with any other external link.

### **15. Teens**

Some social networking sites attract a significant proportion of teenagers. This makes these sites a very attractive place for the BBC to engage with this hard-to-reach age group, which routinely consumes little or no BBC content.

Teenagers clearly do run risks on social networking sites, particularly some 13-15 year olds whose technical knowledge may run ahead of their social skills. They may be at risk from being bullied or from publishing sensitive personal information on their profiles or from treating anonymous online “friends” as if they were real friends and becoming targets for online “grooming”.

Where a BBC brand or site is targeting teenagers, particularly 13-15 year olds, on a social networking site:

- The site should be suitable for the likely audience for the relevant BBC brand or programming
- BBC content and user generated content inspired by a BBC call to action should be suitable for the likely audience on the site

If you are in doubt about the suitability of the site to engage with younger teenagers, it may be worth asking whether it operates within the [Home Office Task Force Good Practice Guidance on Social Networking](#), which is designed to protect children and young people online.

The [Social Media Group wiki](#) contains more information about the likely audience for specific social networking sites. The Central Communities Team in FM&T may also be able to offer advice.

## **16. Children**

We should be sensitive to the minimum age requirements on different social networking sites – often set at 13. These are intended to prevent users below the minimum age from registering for full membership and then being able to publish online. But they also give a clear indication from the site owner about what the owner considers to be a suitable minimum age for casual visitors, even though the site owner may not be able to enforce this.

We should check minimum ages carefully. If we were to post BBC content specifically designed for 6-12 year olds on a site whose stated minimum age is 13, we would run the risk of appearing to encourage visits by 6-12 year olds to a site where contact and content rules and standards are designed to suit teenagers but not children. This might also give the impression that we were encouraging 6-12 year olds to lie about their age in order to interact with that content.

Once uploaded, content clearly unsuitable for 6-12 year olds could very easily be placed right next to BBC content specifically designed for children – and we would in effect have encouraged 6-12 year olds to go there to see it.

## **17. Advertising**

Users generally appear to accept that advertisements on areas of BBC branded social networking pages which are not under our editorial control (eg banner ads) are not our responsibility and are not connected with BBC content. But you should keep on eye on the full range of advertisements which appear on BBC branded pages and you should alert your Interactive Executive/senior editorial figure immediately if clearly inappropriate advertisements for example involving pornography appear on the same pages. For the time being, we should not allow bbc.co.uk video content uploaded by the BBC to contain pre-roll, mid-roll or post-roll advertising if the advertisements are visible from within the UK.

## **18. Legal and Rights issues**

Before we upload BBC material or invite users to upload their user generated content to a page on a social networking site, we should make sure that we are aware of, and comfortable with, the site's own terms and conditions. This is because by uploading our content, it is likely that we are agreeing to be bound by its terms.

For example

- We need to make sure we have the necessary rights to any content we put on third party sites - not only to ensure we do not breach our agreements with rights holders but also because we are likely to be liable to the site itself if we post uncleared material
- Some sites' terms and conditions covering uploaded content only allow "personal" reuse and do not allow any "commercial" reuse of content or envisage any reuse on radio or TV. If you want to reuse uploaded content on radio or TV, you should first consult Legal and Business Affairs to get the necessary consents
- Some sites' terms and conditions state that the site is for personal use only and not for "commercial" use - we should be aware that if we use such a site to promote BBC content, we may technically be in breach
- Some sites will take a pretty broad licence to use BBC content and the BBC trademark ; while this may be a necessary risk, BBC content and BBC brands should only be posted for as long as is necessary and be removed once they have achieved their purposes on the site

In some cases, the BBC has managed to add additional bespoke terms to an informal arrangement, to mitigate risk and facilitate our use of the content. Legal and Business Affairs in FM&T can advise.

## **19. Site Closure**

It is important to have a clear plan from the start about how long the association between the BBC and the site/profile/page will last. Our presence may be tactical, we may wish to hand the space over to the community or it may be sensible to announce closure to its users and then shut the space down. It is incumbent on the person responsible for our presence to maintain the site or to arrange an exit. Above all, we should not leave the site BBC branded but neglected, carrying the risk to the brand without exercising any editorial control.

**This Editorial Policy Guidance Note was first produced on 11 March 2008.**