

# Personal Use of Social Media

## 1. The Purpose

This policy sets out the Forestry Commission's (FC's) position on employees' personal use of social media.

This policy and the associated procedure apply to all personal use of social media, whether during working hours or on your own time, or whether using FC or personal systems and equipment, and apply to all FC employees, as well as any agency workers.

If you require information on the FC's official use of social media, please contact your Digital and Communications Team.

### 1.1 Types of Social Media

Social media is the general term used to describe on-line media applications where individuals and organisations can publish, comment on and share content, including text, pictures and videos.

Examples of social media include, but are not limited to:

- social networking websites - interacting with others and sharing information, often in real time (for example, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or Instagram);
- photo and video sharing websites – sharing photos and videos, often with comments (for example, Flickr, YouTube, Vimeo or Vine);
- blogs - writing long accounts, often on daily life or a specific topic (for example, Blogger or individual's own website);
- on-line instant messaging - (for example, group messages on BlackBerry Messenger (BBM), Hotmail Messenger or WhatsApp);
- wikis and online collaborations – sharing knowledge, taking notes and working collaboratively through adding, amending or deleting content in an online database (for example, Wikipedia or Reddit);
- on-line forums and discussion boards – conversing by posting messages about a general topic or specific area of interest (for example, Pinterest or Netmums); and

- review and opinion websites – posting experiences of products and/or services or asking questions and/or providing answers (for example, TripAdvisor or Yahoo! Answers).

## 2. The Principles

The principles of the policy are to:

- support employees' personal use of social media, providing guidance on enjoying all its benefits whilst minimising the potential risks;
- ensure personal conduct on social media is consistent with the [Civil Service Code](#), the [FC's Values](#), [HR Policy](#) and [HR Procedure – Conduct and Security](#) and all other FC policies and procedures;
- explain how certain personal use of social media could conflict with an employee's position in the FC and as a civil servant;
- set out the FC's reserved rights to investigate personal use of social media, as well as take disciplinary action for any breach of this policy and the associated procedure; and
- comply with relevant legislation and best practice, ensuring that management actions are objective, non-discriminatory and can be justified.

## 3. The Policy

Many people today choose to use social media in their personal capacity. The FC supports any employee who wishes to do so, including using their personal presence on social media to highlight and engage others in the work of the FC.

If you wish to access your personal social media account using FC systems and equipment, you must read and comply with [HR Policy and HR Procedure – FC Email and Internet](#).

Personal use of social media is covered by a number of FC Policy and Procedures, as well as criminal and civil law. This includes, but is not limited to, matters of: employment law; discrimination; harassment; obscenity; human rights; data protection; privacy; official information; confidentiality; freedom of information; fraudulent misrepresentation; defamation; slander; libel; proprietary; intellectual property; plagiarism; copyright; and trademark.

Using social media in your personal capacity is subject to the guidance and rules set out in [HR Procedure – Social Media](#).

Any breach or attempted breach of this policy or the associated procedure will be treated as a disciplinary offence, which may result in a penalty up to and including dismissal.

### 3.1 Your Responsibilities as an Employee

You are expected to:

- make yourself aware of and understand this policy and the associated procedure;
- understand what constitutes acceptable use of social media in your personal capacity, following the guidance and complying with the rules set out in the associated procedure;
- understand and accept that the FC may investigate personal use of social media, in line with Section 5 of the associated procedure; and
- seek advice from your reporting officer if there is anything in this policy or the associated procedure that you do not understand or that is not specifically covered.

### 3.2 Your Responsibilities as a Manager

You are expected to:

- make sure that you and your team(s) understand and comply with this policy and the associated procedure;
- lead by example in your own personal use of social media and encourage a culture of appropriate conduct; and
- address any disciplinary issues or grievances which arise as a result of a breach, or attempted breach, of this policy and the associated procedure, with support from your HR Operations Manager.

### 3.3 Human Resources Responsibilities

Human Resources have responsibility for:

- giving advice and guidance on the application of this policy and the associated procedure;
- supporting managers in addressing any disciplinary issues or grievances which arise as a result of a breach, or attempted breach, of this policy and the associated procedure; and
- monitoring and reviewing this policy and the associated procedure, in consultation with the FC Trade Unions.