

Acceptable Use: Email, Internet, and Social Media

1. Introduction

There has been a rapid and widespread expansion in the use of and access to Email, the Internet and the scope of various electronic devices such as mobile phones, Blackberries, Data Cards, PDA's etc. The use of such systems and devices has become mainstream and for many organisations, the line separating recreational use from legitimate business purposes has become increasingly blurred.

As an organisation the FC has to ensure that the use of any business tool or system is both legitimate and acceptable. Further policy on acceptable usage is contained in the Information Services' [Information Assurance](#) page and Corporate and Forestry Support's [Security](#) page on eConnect, which should be read in conjunction with this Procedure.

2. Using Internet and Email

2.1 Monitoring of FC Systems

If you use FC systems to access the Internet or use Email and/or other communications equipment you are accepting that:

- the FC will, from time to time when it sees fit, examine current and restored information, including the use you make of the Internet, FC systems, the content of any Email, whether business or personal, sent and received by any Email address provided for your use;
- you can have no expectation to absolute privacy in your use of an FC Email account or use of the equipment provided. While the content of Email is not routinely monitored and the FC will not, without proper reason, open clearly marked personal Emails, you are not guaranteed privacy in the Emails that you choose to send;
- email traffic levels are routinely monitored to check system performance. Email passing through the Government Secure Intranet is checked and may be viewed and/or intercepted, to help prevent undesirable or nuisance mail getting onto the internal Email system;
- the FC, by monitoring your Internet and E-mail usage, will collect personal data about you within the meaning of the Data Protection Act 1998.

2.2 Personal Use of FC Systems

Regardless of the FC equipment you use to send Emails or texts, the FC allows limited personal/private use, as long as the content complies with this guidance and your level of use does not interfere with your work, the productivity of other people, or adversely affect the business of the FC.

Where access to the Internet has been granted to you to do your job, or to aid training or learning, the FC permits reasonable, limited personal use. However, personal use of the Internet is a privilege and should be exercised with discretion. The FC retains the right to:

- prohibit access to the Internet for individuals where there is evidence of misuse after investigation;
- block access to certain types of site and;
- restrict access to other sites at peak periods.

When using the Internet in a personal capacity (regardless of the FC equipment used) you must follow these principles:

- personal use should be in your own time e.g. during your lunch break. Limit your use to a level which neither impairs your productivity nor is a burden on the IT system resource;
- where equipment or resources for Internet access are shared for work, people using the resources for business purposes have priority over access for personal use;
- use the Internet in a way that is appropriate to your role. For example, if you are a manager, the FC expects you to set an example to your staff in your 'personal use';
- whilst some Internet sites may not be explicitly prohibited, you are expected to exercise careful judgement in your personal use. As a general rule it is not acceptable to use the Internet for: Internet game playing, sweepstakes or similar; personal postings to Internet groups/web pages; using a non-FC Internet forum; newsgroup sites/services; conducting complicated personal financial transactions such as share dealing;
- in your use of the Internet, be aware that this may waste an IT business resource if you 'minimise' a window displaying an Internet site but then do not use it for some time. Close windows that you are not using.

If you misuse your working time or the equipment through unreasonable or disproportionate personal use, you will be subject to disciplinary action. In serious cases, where the level of personal use over a period of time is unacceptable, the nature of the use is prohibited, or the use has resulted in unreasonable, unauthorised costs, this will be treated as gross misconduct for which the penalty may result in dismissal.

2.3 Email: Sensible Precautions

Email is now a basic aspect of working life for most people. As with other forms of communication, you need to take sensible precautions, know how to use it effectively, and be aware of what should and shouldn't be sent. When using it in your job, please refer to the guidance in [Email: Our Policy and Practice](#).

When using Email, particular care is needed in the following areas:

- never make untrue, unfair, potentially defamatory or libellous statements about individuals or organisations. This applies whether or not the Email is sent outside the FC. The laws relating to written communications apply equally to Email messages, including defamation, libel, copyright, obscenity, fraudulent misrepresentation, and discrimination;
- do not log onto and bring Email across from web based Email services such as AOL or Hotmail;
- do not subscribe to any adult site or service, or any other subscription/site that leads to unreasonable or unauthorised costs, unreasonable levels of personal use, or that does not comply with the guidance on appropriate use of business equipment;
- do not use offensive or aggressive language. Remember that it is possible for the FC to recover messages even if you have deleted them. If in doubt, don't create it, and never send it;
- the content of Email/electronic communications may be disclosed or used as evidence in civil or criminal proceedings, or disclosed under various legislation, including the Data Protection Act 1998, the Environmental Information Regulations and the Freedom of Information Act;
- be cautious of responding to Email chain letters or petitions. Electronic chain letters are wasteful of the FC's IT system business resource, can be a nuisance to other people/colleagues and the content or your support for a 'campaign' may be inappropriate from a 'gov.uk' Email address;
- be very wary of responding to unsolicited e-mails, particularly those that ask for personal details, usernames and passwords, bank account details etc. These may be 'phishing' scam e-mails and if you are in any doubt about the authenticity of any e-mail, simply delete it without responding.

2.4 Internet, Email, Texting: What is Prohibited?

The following are prohibited at any time using FC Email, systems or equipment and any breaches will be treated as misconduct for which the penalty may result in dismissal. You could also be subject to legal proceedings if you have committed an unlawful act.

- accessing, creating, circulating, storing, displaying, downloading or soliciting pornography, sexually explicit, obscene, offensive, or illegal material, messages, texts, images, media clips, videos or links to sites that could reasonably be regarded

as offensive or illegal harassment/discrimination based on the recipient's race, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability or religious belief;

- any attempts to access illegal material, such as child pornography, will be reported to the Police, as required by law;
- using someone else's password and ID to gain unauthorised access to the Internet, even if they have given you their password/permission;
- downloading software, including 'free software', without the permission of IS;
- copying or otherwise acquiring, installing, storing, or using software obtained in violation of the appropriate vendor's licence agreement (commonly called 'piracy');
- using FC systems or equipment at work to help run or set up a private, freelance, or family business/consultancy;
- placing bets via a personal bookmaker's account;
- entering into or varying a legally binding contract outwith existing FC procedures/policies, or where you do not have authority or permission;
- participating in adult chat sites or personal dating services;
- impersonating another person, sending hoax Emails or changing the content of a message which has been sent to you by someone else, with the intention of deceiving or misrepresenting;
- sending/forwarding abusive or bullying Emails/texts;
- emails that amount to a detriment to someone based on their race, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, or religious belief are prohibited and may be illegal discrimination;
- sending or circulating jokes or offensive remarks about an individual e.g. a colleague or contractor even when that individual is not a recipient;
- accessing radio stations or downloading music files or games.

2.5 Impact of Screen Savers and Software

If you judge that there is a business need to download software such as screen savers, video clips, animated graphics and sound files etc you should first contact IS or your local IT infrastructure manager. Even potentially useful products such as the Google toolbar and unsupported versions of software currently in use can cause problems by consuming significant system resources and/or conflicting with our current systems. The FC could be held legally responsible if unlicensed software was discovered to be in use.

3. Use of Social Media

The growth in social media, particularly social networking sites, has created many new ways and opportunities for starting dialogues and initiating conversations. The term 'social media' covers a vast range of software applications including social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Bebo, MySpace), micro-blogging (e.g. Twitter), blogging applications (e.g. Blogger, WordPress), multimedia sharing and networking applications (e.g. YouTube, Flickr), information sharing sites (e.g. Wikipedia), review

and opinion sites (e.g. Google Answers, Yahoo! Answers), forums (e.g. Mumsnet, Digital Spy, iVillage) and dating sites.

3.1 Be Responsible

Everyone is entitled to their opinions however, social media sites should not be used to criticise your employer, raise a grievance or vent anger about your colleagues, customers, workplace etc.

You are personally responsible for what you write or post on social media sites and you should exercise good judgement and common sense. Whether you are using blogging, Tweeting, or other social media channels always remember that your readers may include the wider public such as your colleagues, customers, clients etc and what you publish will be public for a long time. Always consider before you publish anything and make sure that you do not offend or alienate any of these groups.

3.1.1 Your Obligations

As an FC employee you owe implied contractual duties of fidelity and confidentiality and any information that you post on a public forum about the FC and/or its business has the potential to give rise to breach of these duties. Any such breach of fidelity or confidentiality would be a disciplinary issue.

3.2 Personal Use of Social Media

Using social media in a personal capacity is an individual choice however, you need to be mindful that your use of social media does not adversely impact on the FC. In particular, the following are prohibited and any breaches would be a disciplinary issue and if deemed gross misconduct, the penalty may result in dismissal:

- Posting of offensive, defamatory, discriminatory, damaging, libellous, or any other comments on social media sites that the FC may reasonably find objectionable;
- Posting comments about individuals e.g. colleagues, customers, clients or organisations whether public or private that the FC may reasonably find objectionable;
- Disclosure of official, sensitive, or proprietary information;
- Taking part in discussions which conflict with the interests of the FC or bring the name of the FC into disrepute;
- Posting/publishing photographs, video clips or other visual images that the FC may reasonably find objectionable, which conflict with the interests of the FC, or bring the name of the FC into disrepute;
- Taking part in any unlawful activity.

3.3 Business Use of Social Media

Using social media may be appropriate and/or agreed as part of your job, however you must exercise caution when using social media in an official capacity. You must make yourself familiar with the Terms of Service of the social media site you are signing up to. You are representing the FC in an official capacity and everything that you post has the potential to reflect on the FC and its image. You must always act in a professional manner and adhere to the guidance contained in Staff Handbook Chapter 4 and the Civil Service Code of Conduct.

Remember that the rules of disclosure, confidentiality, libel, copyright, defamation, plagiarism, use of logos and trademarks etc also apply to postings on social media sites. You must not:

- make explicit reference to customers, clients, service users, colleagues etc without obtaining their express permission to do so;
- make referrals or recommendations about other individuals, companies, organisations etc;
- explicitly endorse commercial products or services;
- share proprietary, sensitive, or personal information as defined in 'Protective Markings – A guide for FC staff';
- breach privacy;
- act in a way that conflicts with the interest of the FC;
- bring the name of the FC into disrepute;
- bring into question the impartiality of the FC;
- make public statements or remarks that the FC could reasonably find objectionable;
- take part in any unauthorised usage/activities;
- contravene intellectual property issues, content ownership, or regulatory compliance;
- let your use of social media interfere with your primary job responsibilities;
- take part in any unlawful activity.

Any breaches of the above would be a disciplinary issue.