

Code of Practice for the Publishing of Information in Electronic Format

This document was prepared by the University Information Systems Committee (ISC) and ratified by the University Court at their meeting on 19th March 1996. Please ensure that anything you publish does not breach this code.

1. Introduction

1.1 This code of practice governs the use of University computing facilities for the publishing of information in electronic format by staff and students of the University of Aberdeen. Within the context of this document the following definitions apply:

- Publishing means storing or transmitting information in electronic format, by whatever means, such that someone else may be able to have access to it or use it; and such that the publisher or the source of the information may be traced back to the University of Aberdeen. In particular, this includes the use of electronic information systems such as:
 - World Wide Web, bulletin boards, newsgroups and chat fora;
 - Electronic mail, instant messaging and particularly mailing lists and discussion groups;
 - Social networking web sites.
- Information is not limited to words but may include, for example, graphics, visual images, video and sound clips, and computer programs.
- University computing facilities includes all computing and networking facilities provided by the University, including departmental as well as central facilities.
- 'University purposes' means use by staff in connection with their Departmental and other University duties, and by students in connection with their educational activity.

1.2 Failure to observe this code of practice on the part either of students or of staff will be considered a serious matter by the University. To the extent that University policies or national legislation is infringed, such non-observance may lead to the withdrawal of access to University computer services or further disciplinary action.

2. Code of Practice

2.1 University computing facilities may be used for University purposes only, except where other use has been specifically authorised by the University (see *Conditions for Using IT Facilities* [www.abdn.ac.uk/dit/policy.php]).

2.2 It is an essential function of the University to maintain the freedom of staff to publish in electronic as well as any other format material which advances academic activity or furthers the public interest. The University does not therefore exercise direct editorial control over material held on personal pages. However, it reserves the right to remove or deny access to any material which infringes the criteria laid out in 2.3 to 2.5 below, if such material is brought to the attention of staff responsible for the relevant servers.

2.3 All material must take account of, and comply with, official University statements of policy concerning discrimination, harassment and equal opportunities legislation.

2.4 Users must comply with the *Acceptable Use Policy of the Joint Academic Network (JANET)* [www.ja.net/company/policies/janet-aup.html], a copy of which is attached to this document and which has been notified to all staff. In particular, publications must not be offensive, defamatory, indecent or illegal, nor should they publicise access to or provide network links to such material. Further advice on legislation relevant to electronic publishing is given in Section 4.

- 2.5** Nothing must be published which is calculated to bring discredit or harm to the University or its members, or to bring the University into disrepute. Personal opinions must be acknowledged as such, and should not be represented in any way which might make them seem to be those of the University.
- 2.6** Appropriate care should be taken in the presentation, content and management of information being published electronically. This includes:
- care in writing, proofing and layout;
 - adherence to University presentational guidelines, as appropriate;
 - attribution of the source of the information (normally including author, contact address and date);
 - removal of out-of-date information;
 - restriction of access to sensitive information.
- 2.7** Editorial changes to documents in electronic format should be made only with the permission of the owner of the document.

3. Responsibility

- 3.1** Heads of Department or Unit have the responsibility for ensuring that any information published on behalf of their Department or Unit adheres to this Code of Practice.
- 3.2** Staff and students who publish information relating to and on behalf of a department or departmental group (such as course details, staff lists, research interests, etc.) must ensure that they have obtained the requisite permission to do so from the Head of Department or Unit, or his/her delegated nominee.
- 3.3** Those who publish general University information (such as descriptive or historical details or maps) or who make use of the University's crest or any other element of its corporate identity must obtain the requisite permission from the Director of External Affairs.
- 3.4** Staff and students who publish information on behalf of a University society, club or association must ensure that they have the approval of the appropriate officials of the society.
- 3.5** Individuals are responsible and accountable for all information which they publish via the University network (such as a World Wide Web Personal Home Page, or e-mail contributions to a discussion list or bulletin board). Such information must adhere to this Code of Practice, with particular reference to paragraph 2.5 above.
- 3.6** Anyone who registers an address for an electronic information system (such as a departmental server or a personal home page) in an external index must not make it appear that their address is the principal access point for all University of Aberdeen facilities. In particular, the home page of any externally registered World Wide Web server, run on Aberdeen University facilities, must contain a pointer to the University of Aberdeen home page (see Note 1).
- 3.7** Information published on the University World Wide Web servers can be accessed world-wide and copied very easily. It is possible, however, to limit access to information to particular groups of users (see Note 2). Publishers are responsible for deciding whether the information they publish should have restricted access.

4. Legal Framework

4.1 Legislation

The attention of those who publish information in electronic format is drawn to various aspects of UK legislation which relates to computer use. It should be noted that apparently respectable academic usage may risk infringing legislation, for example if transcripts of research material were deemed to represent excessive violence; similarly, material not defamatory in the UK may be seen as such in other

countries. For these and other examples, see below. Distinctions are possible based on whether one is dealing with general legal provisions or with specific Acts.

4.2 General Legality

Defamation

Facts concerning individuals or organisations must be accurate and verifiable and views or opinions must not portray their subjects in any way which could damage their reputation. It should be noted that material which would not be deemed defamatory in the UK may be seen as such in other countries.

Pornography

The display of pornographic material, or publicising access to such material, is not allowed, irrespective of the legality of material in the country of origin.

Protection of Minors

Various legislation exists which is intended to protect minors from certain types of information, such as pornography or material which is considered excessively violent. With an increasing number of schools linking to the Internet, care must be taken to restrict access to any material which might be considered damaging in this regard.

Advertising

It is not expected that World Wide Web or other electronic information services within the University should normally be used for placing or distribution of commercial advertisements. Any advertisements placed, however, must comply with the University's *Policy on the use of University web pages for commercial advertising* [see www.abdn.ac.uk/dit/policy.php] and also the *Code of Practice for Advertisers*, issued by the Advertising Standards Authority, which requires that all advertisements should be 'legal, decent, truthful and honest'.

Incitement

Publications which may incite others to commit criminal acts - or even to contemplate them - are thereby themselves likely to be illegal.

4.3 Specific Legislation

Computer Misuse and similar legislation

It is likely that any material which incites, encourages or enables others to gain unauthorised access to a computer system would be found illegal under statutory provisions.

Copyright, Designs and Patents, Trade Marks

Users should be aware of potential copyright problems (a) if they publish their own material and are thereafter unable properly to police it, and (b) if they infringe another's copyright by republishing material. Various Acts require that the permission of the owner of intellectual property must be sought before any use of it is made whatsoever. It should be noted that the University logos and titles are the property of the University and they may be used only for official University documents.

Data Protection

Legislation provides protection of data which is stored in a computer or other electronic information system, that relates to any living person. The permission of each data subject should be sought and obtained before any information, including photographs, relating to them is stored in the system. The University's Data Protection Officer can provide full details of the University's registration under the relevant Acts (see Note 3).

Equal Opportunities

Any material which discriminates against any person on the grounds of sex, gender and, in some instances, sexual orientation, or encourages such discrimination, contravenes the Act.

Official Secrets

Research or consultancy for governmental bodies may be covered by these acts.

Race Relations and other discrimination. Public Order

Any material that either discriminates or encourages discrimination on racial or ethnic grounds, contravenes parliamentary legislation. Incitement to race hatred or to breach of public order is an offence.

Notes

1. Contact DIT for details of the current address of the University home page.
2. Contact DIT for further information on restricting access to information.
3. The University's Data Protection Officer is Dr David Jones (Registry, University Office).