Supplementary guidance on the
USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The Society recognises its obligation to set and uphold the highest standards of professionalism, and to promote ethical behaviour, attitudes and judgement on the part of psychologists. This is principally addressed in the *Code of Ethics and Conduct*, but the Ethics Committee acknowledges that more and more of our members are using social networking sites or blogs to communicate with friends, family, professional networks and clients. This specific guidance therefore addresses the use of social media by members of the Society and sets out how the *Code of Ethics and Conduct* can be applied in this context and provides practical advice for using them responsibly.

As set out in the *Code of Ethics and Conduct*, psychologists are likely to need to make decisions in difficult, changing and unclear situations. The Society expects that the code will be used to form a basis for consideration of ethical questions, with the principles of the code being taken into account in the process of making decisions. However, no code can replace the need for psychologists to use their professional and ethical judgement.

Thinking about ethics should pervade all professional activity. As clearly stated in Section 3.1(ii) of the *Code of Ethics and Conduct* and the Society's *Member Conduct Rules*; 'Members must not act in a way that damages, or is likely to damage, the reputation of the British Psychological Society' (Rule 1). To this end, the principles set out in the *Code of Ethics and Conduct* apply at all times including when the member is online; it will be judged in the same way and should be at a similar high standard.

You should:

- Remember that social networking sites are public and permanent. Once you have posted something online, it remains traceable even if you later delete it.

- Keep your professional and personal life as separate as possible. This may be best achieved by having separate accounts, for example Facebook could be used for personal use and LinkedIn or Twitter used for professional purposes.

- If 'friends' requests are received from clients and service users, decline the request via more formal means of communication.

- Be minded that whether you identify yourself as a psychologist or not on your profile, you should act responsibly at all times and uphold the reputation of the profession.

- Protect your privacy. Consider the kinds of information that you want to be available about yourself and to whom. Ensure that you regularly check your privacy settings. Be aware that social networking sites may update their services and privacy settings can be reset to a default that deletes your personalised settings.
- Remember that images posted online by family (for example, your children) or friends, may be accessible as they may not set privacy settings as tightly as you do.
- Be minded that social networking sites can make it easier to engage (intentionally or unintentionally) in professional misconduct.
- Report the misconduct of other members on such social networking sites to any relevant parties (such as the employer, the Health Professional Council and the Society).

You should not:
- Establish inappropriate relationships with clients and service users online.
- Discuss work-related issues online in any non-secure medium.
- Publish pictures of clients or service users online, where they are classified as clinical records.
- Use social networking sites for whistle-blowing or raising concerns.
- Post defamatory comments about individuals or institutions. Defamation law can apply to any comments posted on the web, irrespective of whether they are made in a personal or professional capacity

Advice to Educators, Researchers and Employers
- If in place, abide by, or if not, develop clear guidance and policies on social media usage and what constitutes misuse. Additional guidance on conducting research on the internet is also available from the Society.
- Ensure that those responsible for enforcing such guidance and policy are consistent in their application and fully understand the requirements set out.
- Ensure that any complaints regarding the use of social media are dealt with in the same manner as any other form of complaint. In some cases, online misconduct can be damaging and have longer-term consequences, due to the permanency and traceability of material published online.

In recognition of the rapid developments in social media and its uses, this guidance will be regularly reviewed by the Ethics Committee and members will be alerted to any updated version as soon as it becomes available.

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