



## **Political neutrality guidelines**

These guidelines have been produced for staff and elected members to ensure their professional activities on behalf of the Association do not contravene the Association's stance of political neutrality, and to also help colleagues identify any potential conflicts with this policy in their activities outside of the BDA.

### **What does political neutrality mean for staff and elected members?**

The BDA asserts that it is free of any party political allegiance, and sets its policies in the best interests of the profession and the patients it serves. Staff are expected to implement those policies to the best of their ability, and it is a mark of professional behaviour that no political bias or indication of private conviction is evident in the manner in which staff discharge their duties. Staff should also avoid any overt manifestations of political allegiance in the workplace, such as wearing clothing with political slogans or displaying posters.

Elected members should contribute to debate on policy issues in the best interests of the profession, and their patients and constituents. Again, elected members should not exhibit any party political bias in the democratic and policy making processes of the Association, and should accept cabinet responsibility for the policies of the BDA in all public forums.

### **Does this mean that staff or elected officials cannot be members or activists of political parties?**

Staff and elected officials can join, and actively support, a political party in a private capacity.

However colleagues should be mindful of joining any public platform or engaging in any public debate that may associate their private opinions with those of the BDA. Usually this means sensitivity about any public debate or party policy relating to dental matters or possibly wider health issues. If any member of staff or elected member anticipates individual exposure to the media or in a public forum that may bring them into conflict with BDA policy, then s/he should alert the Chief Executive who will advise and support the colleague concerned in the most appropriate way. Advice and support will take into account the extent to which a conflict arises, the likely reaction or level of media interest, and the sensitivity or seniority of the position held by the member of staff or elected member.

### **Does a conflict mean that a member of staff or elected member will be asked to choose between their employment /involvement with the BDA and their private political activities?**

So long as the Chief Executive is advised of any potential conflict, the aim will be to manage the situation as effectively as possible. It is anticipated that in the great majority of cases, with good sense on both sides, any difficulties can be resolved or minimised. However it is possible that where strong private convictions are expressed in public and conflict with core policies of the BDA, then continued employment or democratic involvement with the Association may be incompatible. Again, this is likely to depend on the extent to which a conflict arises, the likely media reaction, and the sensitivity or seniority of the position held.

In these circumstances any action taken in regard to a member of staff will be consistent with the demands of employment law. Any action against an elected official will be given careful consideration by the Ethics Committee, observing both the demands of natural justice and the fact that any decision taken by the Ethics Committee in this regard will set a precedent for the future.



**Does a conflict arise if a member of staff or elected member belongs to a political party that has policies that conflict with those of the BDA?**

Generally no, as it is not the business of the BDA to restrict the right of a member of staff or elected official to join a legally constituted political party in a private capacity. However individuals may be held accountable for their own words or actions, and this includes their acceptance of the values of the Association. For example the BDA serves a diverse profession, and of course there is increasing diversity in the patient population the profession itself serves. As such the BDA is committed to equality of opportunity and treatment, and does not tolerate discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, age, marital status, sexual orientation, or any other irrelevant consideration. Any public actions or statements that contravene these values may call into question the continued employment of an individual or their involvement as an elected official. Again, any action taken against an individual will be consistent with the demands of employment law and natural justice.

**Can a member of staff or elected official be a candidate for a political party in an election?**

Yes, though again the Chief Executive should be alerted as soon as possible about a candidate selection. The Chief Executive will facilitate appropriate advice and support, taking into account potential conflicts and the likely media interest in the individual's connection to the BDA. Again in most cases this should be handled effectively with good sense on both sides, and may also involve liaison between the individual and the political party s/he is representing.

However, continued employment with the BDA or in an elected position may be called into question in some circumstances, most likely where a very senior member of staff or elected official is a candidate and who may be involved in high profile criticism of the profession or the policies of the Association in the conduct of an election campaign.

**These guidelines address common questions about the policy of political neutrality adopted by the BDA. Other questions may arise, and in these circumstances issues should be referred to the Chief Executive who shall provide an interpretation of the policy. Any potential conflict that involves the Chief Executive should be referred for interpretation to the Chair of the Principal Executive Committee.**