

# POLICY ON INTERNET ACCESS AT THE BRITISH LIBRARY

<http://www.bl.uk>

## Introduction

As one of the world's great research libraries the British Library aims to facilitate access within its Reading Rooms to *any* material that may be required for research purposes, whether the researcher in question is from an academic background or a member of the general public wishing to study for their private interest.

Therefore the Library's aim is to offer its Readers the fullest possible access not only to its physical and digital collections but also to content available on the web.

However, given the diverse range of visitors to the Library's premises and the resultant need to consider individual sensitivities whilst also safeguarding the Library's IT networks and maintaining compliance with UK law, it is necessary for the Library to actively manage access to the internet, albeit with the minimum possible restrictions applied.

The measures taken by the Library to achieve this are outlined below.

## Reading Room PCs

Within the Library's Reading Rooms the assumption is made that registered British Library Readers (normally required to be 18 years and over) require full access to the resources of the web and as such content available via the Library's PCs is largely unfiltered. However, baseline filtering is applied in order to screen out malware and illegal content, minimise the risk of breaches of copyright (through use of online communication tools such as webmail) and to protect the BL's network.

Similarly, access to websites archived under Non-Print Legal Deposit – the Legal Deposit UK Web Archive – is also unfiltered on Reading Room terminals.

It must, however, be recognised that Reading Rooms still represent a shared public environment serving a diverse user community. As such Readers are asked to consider fellow readers and to exercise care and discretion when using the internet – whether on Library terminals or their own devices - to ensure that others are not inadvertently exposed to extreme or unpleasant visual material that may cause distress. Failure to do so may be considered a breach of the Library's [Conditions of Use](#).

Readers wishing for research purposes to access content that they think might have the potential to cause distress to other readers should ask Library staff to direct them to terminals designated for this purpose.

## WiFi

As well as access via its own terminals the Library also provides a free WiFi service covering both its Reading Rooms and public areas allowing visitors access to the internet on their own devices.

However, unlike its Reading Rooms, the public areas of the British Library are not primary research environments but areas where people of all ages mingle and meet. Due to the high numbers of children, young people and on occasion vulnerable adults who may be present in these public spaces, the Library considers it appropriate to implement a higher level of web filtering within this service. Here the particular focus is on minimising extreme or unpleasant visual material which may cause distress even when only seen briefly.

To this end the filtering applied to the Library's WiFi service is based on guidelines previously developed by the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA) and is similar to services found in many other public spaces around the UK, including public libraries and Higher Education institutions.

The full current list of blocked categories is: Child Abuse, Criminal Activity, Gambling, Gore, Hacking, Malware, Piracy / Copyright Infringement, Pornography, Peer-to-Peer Networking, Search Suggestions (to avoid inappropriate suggestions), Self-Harm, Terrorism, Violence, Web Proxies.

It is of course recognised that any form of filtering can on occasion lead to errors or mis-categorisation. As such the filtering service is kept under regular review and a clearly-advertised process made available to users to provide feedback about sites they believe should not have been blocked. A rapid and robust procedure also exists to address any instances of this nature.

While web access using visitors' own internet / phone provider (i.e. using a dongle or similar and 3G- or 4G-enabled mobile devices) cannot be restricted, visitors are still asked to consider the sensitivities of other users and to exercise care and discretion when using the internet to ensure that no-one is inadvertently exposed to visual material that may cause them distress.