

The Booksellers Association: When We Speak and When We Don't; How We Support Each Other in a Climate of Collaboration

The Booksellers Association of the UK & Ireland Ltd is a membership organization for all types of bookshop and bookseller. Our mission is to advocate for, support, represent, promote and celebrate bookshops and booksellers, and our vision is to have the commercial, cultural and community importance of bookshops recognized by consumers, publishers, authors and the wider book trade, and by the government and the media. As such, we lobby, advise and campaign on issues that affect our members in their business dealings as booksellers.

As a membership organisation, we focus our actions where we can make a positive difference. We advocate for booksellers, and direct them to tools and resources that might assist their professional work, including BA Learning, the BA Learning Skills Hub and a range of products, services and advice, which can be found on the BA website and in our publications:

www.booksellers.org.uk

Given the often heightened political landscape, and the polarisation of views, it can be challenging for membership organizations – which, by necessity, represent a multiplicity of types of businesses in membership – to deal with requests to comment or opine on current issues. The remit of the BA is very clear – we are here to support and celebrate bookselling in its entirety – and we are not authorised, or always qualified, to comment on matters beyond our remit. This policy document seeks to clarify the situations in which we will and will not comment.

In short, we only comment on issues congruent with our wider mission. This allows us to focus our responses, to engage only where we are informed and can make a difference, and to protect our members' freedom of expression.

*We are very grateful to the **Society of Authors**, on whose policy documents we have heavily relied to create this document for the BA. Their generosity in sharing their carefully and thoughtfully created documentations for their own members is deeply appreciated.*

1. Scope

This document applies to comments, statements and information shared on communications channels and social media accounts owned by the Booksellers Association. It does not apply to information that staff, volunteer officeholders or representatives share on personal accounts.

2. Advocacy and Campaigning

We represent the collective interests of our members: we speak out publicly on issues that affect the rights and interests of bookshops and booksellers, where it is likely that there would be majority consensus from within our membership, and/or where a collective voice is required to gain political traction.

With over 900 corporate members, the BA includes booksellers from every background, working at every career stage, and who are driven by a full spectrum of experience and opinion. The BA must therefore tread a fine line when considering whether to comment. If issues arise over which our membership would be divided, we would be unlikely to comment publicly as we

are mandated to represent the collective voice of our membership. We can make the most difference, and we are most informed, in our focused and prioritised areas of specialism.

3. General Political Issues

We are sometimes invited to comment publicly, or to release statements, on issues of a more general political nature, not directly or primarily related to bookselling. The BA is a membership organization for booksellers: we do not comment on party politics or geopolitical situations.

4. Key Guidelines

When assessing any request to comment publicly, release a statement or share information, we consider a number of different factors including (but not limited to):

Mission: how the issue or challenge fits with our mission of empowering booksellers and their bookshops.

Knowledge and influence: whether we know enough to comment, and whether a comment or statement from us can influence the issue or challenge.

Impact: what the impact or outcome of a public statement would be.

Representation: whether our membership as a whole would be broadly in agreement on the issue or challenge, and with the wording of any statement.

Opportunity: whether members would benefit from a statement raising awareness of an issue.

Focus: whether it would be better to intervene privately and directly on behalf of a member.

Remit: whether another organisation or individual is better placed to comment or if a statement might have greater impact if made in partnership with other organisations.

Capacity: how much staff capacity we have and the extent to which work on the issue would take away from core work.

Timing: whether we can respond in a meaningful timeframe.

Risks: whether a statement or comment risks making the situation worse or provoke hate. We also need to consider any legal and reputational risks of releasing a statement or comment.

Impact on members: whether our comment threatens our members' rights to comment freely on any issue.

Reputation or endorsement: whether a statement from the BA would unintentionally endorse an opinion, product or service.

Precedent: whether releasing a seemingly uncontentious statement or comment in one case would create an expectation that we would comment on all such cases in the future.

In practice, our immediate response to any request to comment may be 'it depends'. We consider all requests thoughtfully and will always enter into private dialogue and provide a clear and reasoned explanation of our decision-making process and position to any member who asks us. We will not enter into public debate on our reasons for responding, or not, on any issue. We also acknowledge that there may be occasions where an issue transcends bookselling, but enough member consensus exists for us to legitimately express a collective view. We will never stand in the way of individual BA members exercising their own freedom of expression.

5. BA Online Networks

In addition to the Key Guidelines above on how and when the BA itself will comment on issues, we encourage BA Members to be respectful of others and their differing views if they share their professional experiences, both positive and negative, and to broaden discussion, support each other, and network with fellow members in our private online spaces.

The BA Booksellers Network Facebook page has clear terms of reference, which apply to any material members post within that forum – whether words, images, videos, audio or other formats.

The Booksellers Network Facebook Group Rules & Group Information

The Booksellers Network is a space for booksellers who are members of the Booksellers Association to come together; to share ideas, offer mutual support, provide professional development and networking opportunities, and feel part of the wider bookselling community.

This is a BA group, and we try quite hard to keep it to working booksellers. The only way we will know if someone has left bookselling is if that individual - or their employer - let us know so we can remove them from the group. If someone becomes a bookseller again in the future, they are very welcome to re-join the group.

Please kindly follow the group rules as stated below.

1. Be kind and courteous

We're all in this together to create a welcoming environment.

Let's treat everyone with respect. Healthy debates are natural, but kindness is required.

2. No hate speech or bullying

Make sure that everyone feels safe. Bullying of any kind isn't allowed, and degrading comments about things such as race, religion, culture, sexual orientation, gender or identity will not be tolerated.

3. Respect everyone's privacy

Being part of this group requires mutual trust. Authentic, expressive discussions make groups great, but may also be sensitive and private. What's shared in the group should stay in the group.

4. No inappropriate commercial activity

We recognise that occasionally you may want to promote something your business sells/offers. Please keep posts about this to a minimum – the group is not for selling to booksellers, but rather for sharing advice, encouragement and support between bookselling businesses.

5. Respect competition rules

As a trade association, we take competition compliance seriously. Whilst discussions can cover matters of interest to our industry, we cannot discuss or exchange sensitive commercial information in this group. If at any time you think discussions may be in breach of competition rules, please feel free to report the post/comment. We may have to remove any posts or comments that are in breach of competition rules.

As detailed above, BA Members are asked to remain kind and courteous, respect others, and refrain from posting irrelevant links, commercial messages, or spam. Hate speech and bullying are not tolerated.

For further information, see the next item on the **Book Industry Statement on Professional Values**, of which the BA is a founding organisation and signatory. We encourage all BA members to adopt and support the Statement, and to share it amongst your networks – it can be found here <https://tinyurl.com/2mdf64ek>

6. Book Industry Statement on Professional Values

We seek to ensure that the BA remains a respectful, considerate and professional organisation. The BA is committed to protecting the rights and dignity of employees, members and industry colleagues, and we expect the same commitment from others.

Everyone who interacts with the BA has a right to work in an environment in which their dignity is respected and which is free from harassment, bullying and discrimination. This includes (but is not limited to) communications with staff, visits to the BA premises, attendance at BA events, serving on BA committees or being involved in BA project conversations.

For all professional interactions, we request that members conduct themselves in accordance with the Book and Publishing Industry's Professional Values, the principles of which are reflected below.

CROSS INDUSTRY STATEMENT ON PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND BEHAVIOUR

Created and written by the Book & Publishing Industry EDI Forum, this document lays out in unambiguous terms the values and behaviours we share and seek to encourage in our professional interactions across our industry. This document is limited to professional behaviour in work environments (online and offline) though it does not cover authorship itself.

Through the **ten points below**, we aim to hold ourselves and our colleagues in the industry to high standards of professional behaviour, based on mutual respect, compassion, humanity, an openness to difference and an unwavering commitment to the free exchange of ideas.

This document is intended to be top-level, aspirational, and collegiate. It is a clear statement of what we expect from ourselves and others in our professional communications, regardless of whether those behaviours take place online or in the workplace.

We are not standards bodies, but we believe that an industry commitment of this kind can support an industry-wide culture we can be proud of – one which is welcoming to all, respectful of all, and supportive of all.

- 1. We in the sector (booksellers, agents, authors, and publishing professionals) support and are champions of creative expression and freedom of speech.** We understand the power of what is printed and published and will endeavour to protect the passion, imagination and creativity of everyone in our industry.
- 2. Authors, publishing professionals, agents and booksellers are colleagues and collaborators in business and we expect a high standard of professional behaviour from one another.**

3. **Our professional communication will be respectful to all parties.** We understand that at times we may not agree with one another but understand how and what we communicate might impact others positively but also negatively.
4. **We celebrate and actively promote and cultivate diversity and inclusion in all its forms,** including but not limited to the nine protected characteristics cited in The Equality Act 2010 as well as socio economic status, educational background, caring responsibilities, and geographical location and we condemn abuse and the incitement of hatred of any kind.
5. **We will endeavour to ensure that everyone in our industry is treated with dignity and respect so that individuals are supported and are able to speak out.** We recognise that power is situational and that we can all be in a position of greater relative power over others.
6. **We support and are sensitive to the mental health of our colleagues and other industry professionals as well as those experiencing chronic illness, neurodiversity, disability and other physical challenges.** We recognise that not all disabilities are visible.
7. **We are working towards improving inclusion and access for everyone to our industry across all the areas mentioned in 4 above.**
8. **Our professional behaviour is thoughtful and anticipates consequences** – and is required in every environment where people interact for work reasons, including but not limited to: offices, bookshops, parties, committees, lunch meetings, awards ceremonies, rights fairs, festivals and any other venue, formal or informal; as well as online and in all communications.
9. **We have a right to personal privacy, and to feel safe and valued in the working environment.**
10. **We will support one another and take action by:**

Listening: If someone tells us that they find something racist, sexist, bullying, threatening, or uncomfortable, they have a right to that feeling. We will behave with empathy, respect and understanding.

Being Allies: We will not remain silent in the face of unacceptable behaviour. We will listen to, speak up for and empower those who have experienced such behaviour. We will bear witness and support appropriate action being taken, regardless of the status or the relative status of the individuals involved.

Being Aware Of Company Policies: If you do not think there is one, ask. As industry associations, we encourage our members to promote and implement the standards of professional behaviour set out in this document and to create and endorse company policies which reflect these principles

Useful definitions

Harassment is defined by the Equality Act as ‘unwanted conduct ... which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual’.

Bullying is defined by ACAS as 'as unwanted behaviour from a person or group that is either offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting or an abuse or misuse of power that undermines, humiliates, or causes physical or emotional harm to someone.'

The Equality Act 2010 is the UK's discrimination law which protects individuals from unfair treatment and promotes a fair and more equal society. The protected characteristics covered by the legislation are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation