



A POLICY FOR THE GUEST BLOGS

INTRODUCTION

The process

The practice has been continuing for many years. It is unclear when it began.

The client/company pays a one-off fee for their blog to be placed on the SHA website.. The client is given a direct link to the article and they then add that link to whatever platforms they are using.

Guest posts classed as Advertisement blogs are not on the homepage and are buried deep in the website, so any ordinary user of the SHA website is unlikely to see it.. The company blog is findable only from a google search. Even then the post may not be found on the first few pages of the search.

Ken replies to any company requesting a sponsored blog to be placed on our website as follows:

"We charge £30 to publish a supplied post/article and we charge £20 per link into an existing article on our website/blog. We use PayPal to generate our invoices.

Guest/sponsored posts will not be readily viewed by website users. Posts are not on the Home page but in various folders within a special folder. A direct link will be provided.

All content and links are checked for suitability. We will not accept posts that promote links or content for:

- *Gambling, casino*
- *Adult links or content.*
- *Pay Day loans content*
- *Private Hospitals/Clinics in the UK.*
- *Cigarette smoking"*

An example of Ken replying to an inappropriate request is here:

"Sorry, under no circumstances will we host any adult material, nor any gambling or casino related content.

Please do not ask again and remove any contact info you have for the Socialist Health Association.

Regards,

Ken Smith (SHA Admin)"

The income

The sponsored posts bring in approximately £9K a year.

CONCERNS RAISED BY CENTRAL COUNCIL

Everyone agrees that the sponsored blogs are of great concern. Many say that the SHA should not be associated with them at all.

Many say that the sponsored blogs are actually difficult to find on the website and others that, if any sponsored blogs remain, they should not be publicly visible.

A few say that the website should be closed now until the sponsored blogs are removed.

There is concern about any legal obstacles to removing the sponsored blogs. How can we dissociate ourselves from any contractual obligation?

There is concern about the financial impact of removing or stopping all sponsored blogs.

Please see Appendix A at the end for all comments.

SOLUTIONS SUGGESTED BY CC MEMBERS

Better screening of sponsored blogs

- (a) all future SHA website adverts should be thoroughly screened including all hyperlinks;
- (b) no adverts reviewing or recommending medical, nutritional, physical, or mental therapies or substances should be accepted;
- (c) no adverts which run counter to SHA policies or principles should be accepted;
- (d) in any cases of uncertainty, the judgment of at least three of the officers (Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Vice Chairs) will be considered as final;
- (e) the breast reconstruction advert referred to above should be removed immediately and the fee returned to the advertiser;
- (f) these recommendations should be implemented immediately

Increased income to compensate for stopping the blogs:

Consider increasing membership fees or at least put that to CC and AGM.

Ensure guest blogs cannot be found on searches.

Remove the most egregious guest blogs and see if the advertisers object.

Update our social media and web site policy. Can we learn from the Labour Party?

We should anyway have an ethical policy as good practice.

Mechanism to complain if screening process breached

POLICY RECOMMENDED BY THE OFFICERS

- All future SHA sponsored blogs should be thoroughly screened including all hyperlinks
- screening should be by the Officers. Any edge cases to be reviewed by one person elected by CC
- No sponsored blogs should be visible when searching the site
- Guest blogs should not be viewable by casual users of the SHA website
- The current more egregious blogs (usually agreed years ago) should be taken down and reactions from companies monitored. If recompense is required, we pay.
- No blogs should be accepted recommending the following:
 - private health services in the UK
 - plastic surgery anywhere
 - smoking, alcohol, unhealthy substances
 - gambling, casino
 - adult links or content.
 - Pay Day loans content
- The Treasurer will explore alternative sources of income to enable us to eliminate dependency on guest blogs

- We shall develop a mechanism to complain if the screening process has been breached

APPENDIX A - COMMENTS FROM CENTRAL COUNCIL MEMBERS

I agree with the consensus that the links sent through are of great concern and the SHA should not be associated with them.

I've been looking at the website for these adverts and am struggling to find them. I've also never come across them whenever I've visited the site previously.

I am attaching information about the rubbish which is on the SHA website, and which I find utterly appalling. I haven't had time to look through all the pages, and dread to think what might be on the ones I haven't looked at.

I think the whole website should be closed until all advertisements are removed, and so-called 'articles' which should have no place on the SHA website are identified and removed.

I request that you forward this to members of Central Council for their information - because at present they are all equally responsible for this offensive material being available under the SHA name.

I complained to Martin about these advertisements about three to four years ago. Following that I first raised the matter with the CC and it was arising from that discussion that Alex, as chair, produced a report and the list of actions outlined earlier.

Prior to these actions members will remember that these advertisements were prominent on the front pages of the SHA site -- at times they were so bizarre I even wondered if they were a spoof. Many of them were offensive and could have done nothing to enhance the reputation of the SHA.

Over recent years I have not been aware of these ads. as they did not appear on the "front pages" of the SHA site and I never stumbled across them when searching our web site. I remember that Ken reported that he had cleared the site except for a few legacy ads that were technically more difficult to address. It is therefore very surprising to hear that we are still accepting them --- for any reason whatsoever.

You seem to suggest that we are contracted to accept some of these ads. We need to get more information on that and pursue ways of terminating those contracts. It would also be helpful if Ken could give the CC an update on the legacy advertisements that remained on the site following his earlier clean up.

Quite the sooner we are out of these adds the better as I thought we had done so

I support your approach. I also feel uncomfortable about the blogs, but we need to be very careful about the impact on our finances, and also any legal obstacles to removing them. Sadly our opponents are using every opportunity to undermine us, even at the risk of bringing the organisation down.

You have only partially responded to the points I made in my email about the website – and even on those points I do not accept your unwillingness to do anything urgently about the website.

You say that:

"The blogs are difficult for casual routine users to find on the site. We have never had a complaint from any user of the website. I have found that they appear mostly when I use the search function. We are in discussion with the person who looks after our website and it looks likely that we will be able to ensure that the blogs no longer appear even on a search."

Well, you have a complaint from me now. The offensive and unacceptable blogs and advertisements do not only appear when someone uses the search function. As I pointed out in my email, there are lists on individual web pages which make no distinction between genuine articles and so-called 'blogs' or advertisements. I gave you several examples from the Work and Health and the Mental Health pages. There are a number of items about disability and about students for no apparent reason on the Work and Health page. I think the failure to treat issues around disability as deserving a page of their own is discriminatory. And one point I didn't include in my original email – on the Work and Health page there doesn't appear to be one reference from or about trade unions. What does that say about the SHA as a supposed Labour Movement organisation?

It is not good enough to say that dodgy blogs won't appear even on a search - because actually they do. There needs to be a complete overhaul of the whole of the website, and someone needs to clean up every single page and remove any items which are not genuine and useful articles. And there needs to be proper thought as to the range of pages to be included and what useful and relevant links should be on each page.

You go on to say:

"They have earned us over £40K over the years. The organisation could not continue without that revenue. In addition, if we stopped hosting them we would be liable to be challenged by the companies who would at least be entitled to a refund."

I am disgusted, but frankly not surprised, that you speak as if with pride about how much this obnoxious material has brought in over the years. There is no way that this is 'earned' income. It is dishonest and bordering on immoral. If the organisation cannot continue without such dirty money, then perhaps the organisation should not continue. If that amount of money is so important, then there will have to be proper discussion about fundraising and the subscription rate. No doubt money launderers, pornographers, people 'living on immoral' earnings count their takings and say they couldn't operate without them. A supposedly socialist organisation should have somewhat higher integrity.

It is absolutely not justification to say, as you do, that this has been going on under various SHA administrations:

"If the sponsored blogs are bringing the SHA into disrepute, then many previous administrations have been in the same position."

I have read Alex Scott-Samuel's and Alison Scouller's emails about this issue, and it is clear that despite their best endeavours, the people who were asked to sort this out (first Martin Rathfelder and then Jean Hardiman-Smith and Ken Smith) have not done so. You were Chair at some time in the past, so do you include yourself in previous administrations which brought the SHA into disrepute?

"I would be in favour of the Officers formally investigating this issue, with input from Ken, hearing from people with views on both sides of the argument. The results of the investigation to be put to CC."

There does not need to be an 'investigation' – and certainly not one including an Officer, Jean Hardiman-Smith, and Ken Smith who are both implicated in not having dealt with this matter adequately for some years.

And what do you mean by "hearing from people with views on both sides of the argument"? There should be no argument that any materials which are offensive, sexist, discriminatory, touting for business should appear anywhere on the SHA website.

The report written by Ken Smith which you attached is not truthful. It says:

"The client/company pays a one-off fee for their blog to be placed on the SHA website. It is not on the homepage and is buried deep in the website, so any ordinary user of the SHA website is very unlikely to see it, even if they click on the section called "Advertisements" which only hosts old sponsored blogs. The guest blog is findable if someone searched specifically for it."

As I have shown on the two pages that I have looked at there are many items which are clearly not appropriate for the SHA website. They are not hidden, you do not have to know what they are to search for them – they are listed and available at one click alongside other items which are appropriate. So it would appear to anyone using the website that because there is no distinction between them that the SHA endorses or at least does not disapprove of them, and no critical comment or warning that they are advertisements or paid-for content, as Alex Scott-Samuel referred to in his report in 2017:

"Because we are a principled health related organisation, it's natural for people who visit our website to assume that at the very least, we don't disapprove of anything we advertise."

I suppose an alternative possibility is that all the rubbish I've found on the two pages I've looked at is not actually paid-for content or blogs, but are items which someone has sought and actively put on the website. In that case, that person has no place in the SHA. These items clearly do not follow the recommendations in Alex Scott-Samuel's report, such as:

“(b) no adverts reviewing or recommending medical, nutritional, physical, or mental therapies or substances should be accepted;”

Ken Smith also says:

Guest/sponsored posts will not be readily viewed by website users. Posts are not on the Home page but in various folders within a special folder. A direct link will be provided.

All content and links are checked for suitability. We will not accept posts that promote links or content for:

- *Gambling, casino*
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- *Pay Day loans content*
- *Private Hospitals/Clinics in the UK.*
- *Cigarette smoking*

As I have said, it is not true that ‘sponsored posts’ are not readily viewable – they are. It is disingenuous to say that they are not on the Home page, when they are just one or two clicks away openly on other pages. They are not ‘within special folders’. And as for checking for suitability, the limited list cited is just not good enough. It presumably is considered acceptable to accept posts which promote a wide variety of cosmetic surgery, private hospitals and clinics *outside* the UK, or indeed for more or less anything so long as it’s in the USA.

You say that:

Ken now rejects many of the companies as unsuitable and Jean does an ethical review of particularly contentious blogs. Clearly, some sponsored blogs slip through this net.

I don’t know what set of ethics Jean adheres to, and Ken and Jean’s ‘net’ appears to have very big holes in it.

Get something done about this now. Close the website until someone or a group can rebuild all the pages and include only genuine articles and references which the SHA would be proud to host.

I endorse what Alex says about efforts to get action on this when he was chair. As with many other issues concerning the website when I was vice chair and Alex chair, we were constantly obstructed in taking action by being ‘blinded with science’ about the difficulties which we ‘did not understand’ with making changes. Alex’ paper still adequately summarises the action needed.

I think Caroline is right that for the time being the website should be closed.

You seem to be able to make decisions over the email in many ways since your 'Investigation' in July, Brian. How about a poll on two issues:

1. Should the website be closed for the time being?
2. Implement Alex's report

I am disturbed by your complacent response Brian. You are saying that it is okay to have unethical and distasteful material on the SHA website because it brings in money; most people are unaware of it; and it has been happening for a long time.

I did my very best to get rid of this disreputable practice and took a detailed paper (attached) to Central Council in June 2017, soon after I became Chair. My recommendations were that:

Action on this issue should not be delayed any longer. Central Council is asked to support the following recommendations:

- (a) all future SHA website adverts should be thoroughly screened including all hyperlinks;
- (b) no adverts reviewing or recommending medical, nutritional, physical, or mental therapies or substances should be accepted;
- (c) no adverts which run counter to SHA policies or principles should be accepted;
- (d) in any cases of uncertainty, the judgment of at least three of the officers (Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Vice Chairs) will be considered as final;
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Unfortunately our former director, who had established the advertisements, argued against me. Central Council resolved that our then (and now) Secretary should carry out an evaluation and report back. Despite repeated efforts on my part, no remedial action was ever taken.

So it is misleading to imply that previous administrations shared your view of this unethical practice. Nor is it acceptable to say that we can continue to live off these immoral earnings because most ----- people are unaware of it. Please act now.

They usually simply demand we stop. No indication as to how we deal with the 9k pa loss, or a potential demand for 40k of refunds. We were also accused of lying about that. People had to dig to find them after we stopped sending out the link to all members. I suspect they were discovered by using an old email. The new ones are less contentious except for one mistake. Ken is slowly removing the worst, checking for reactions, so that work has already started. I blocked ASS from

removing them totally due to funding maybe needed in respect of MR. They are now invisible to all searches. I think it only needs a report. I might have to oversee every one.

It's clearly important to know what is in the kitty and the shortfall after routine annual expenses. It may be necessary to consider increasing membership fees or at least put that to CC and AGM. Since the labour party has a social media and web site policy is there anything we can learn from them?

We should anyway have an ethical policy as good practice. But if not required by the advertiser then adverts should not be publically visible anyway.

I don't like ads and avoid commercial TV/ radio on that basis. But, given the financial issues, anyone who complains about them - me included - has to make a case for how we raise the same level of income from other sources.

I don't have an answer - apart from raising membership fees - which has other consequences. Until we do have a fully worked out answer I don't think I can make a good case for abandoning them. But they do need to be monitored and intrusive impact, if any, minimised.

I think adverts that are contrary to our principles should be taken down and we should forgo the expense

For me red lines would be - private medicine, insurance, non evidence based treatments (even any commercial advert for medical treatment is questionable imo), anything advertising something that could harm health. I would be ok with adverts for osteopaths or podiatrists I suppose, or comfy mattresses that sort of thing.

" and were instituted, with full Central Council approval, both then and since, to avoid the SHA from closing due to lack of finances. Due to current losses under the previous administration this remains more the case than before."

Really important issue is clarity about criteria used in vetting applications to post an advert- thought we had those drafted?

Confirmation that process in place that is applying the criteria

Mechanism for SHA members to complain if advert seems to breach the guidelines
