

Social Media

Podbriefing Audio Transcript

00:19

Hello. Welcome to this podbriefing on social media. My name is Liz Mossop. I'm an Academic at the School of Veterinary Medicine and Science here at the University of Nottingham.

Social Media is increasingly forming an intrinsic part of our lives. We all use it in our personal life and increasingly it's being used in our professional lives as well. Of course, there are things that can go wrong and that's what we're here to talk about today, in order to understand how to protect the reputation of the University, its staff and students. Joining me today is David Potter, an Employment Lawyer.

00:51

Hello.

00:53

So could we start by talking about what is social media?

00:56

Yes, well it has a very broad definition. It covers any online interactive tool that encourages participation, interaction and exchanges. It's an area that's constantly changing and developing. Current examples of social media platforms are YouTube, LinkedIn and Facebook. It also covers things like instant messaging and blogs.

01:20

And the University has recently designed a social media policy, can you tell me why it's necessary for the University to have this kind of a policy?

01:29

Most large employers now have social media policies. Like the University's policy, which is referenced at the end of the film, they highlight both the usefulness of social media as a means of communication, whilst also highlighting the dangers and hazards of misuse of social media.

Due to the reach of social media and speed of sharing, the potential for reputational damage, both to the University and the individual employer's concerned is always there.

My experiences of cases that I have dealt with is that problems with social media are on the increase, and it is important that employees are aware of what is and what's not acceptable.

02:09

Social media is something that I use in my personal life but increasingly we're starting to use it more and more in our academic lives as well. For example at the Vet School we've been using Twitter to help run some revision sessions for final year students. We also use other resources like Flickr to store and share images with others, and I've used the tool called Scoop.it to collect resources together to help students with their learning. Increasingly, the University is using social media as well. People almost expect it to be a form of communication, so for potential students and marketing activities, as well as letting the general public know what's happening at the University. So I'm aware of the great benefits of using social media but I'm also increasingly aware of some of the challenges surrounding it as well. Could you tell me a little bit more about that?

02:55

I think the essential thing to understand is once you put something out there you lose effective control of it and therefore you need to reflect on how it might impact on your reputation and the reputation of the University.

03:08

Still alright for 4 o'clock?

03:09

Yeah, sure. See you at four.

03:13

Cheers guys.

03:14

Cheers, thanks. I'm dying for a coffee.

03:15

Yeah, absolutely. [inaudible second speaker]

03:26

So errr, how do you think Sally's getting on after her promotion?

03:29

That's a coincidence, I'm just updating my Facebook status on that very subject.

03:36

Mind you don't errr strain a thumb!

03:38

[laughs] Good one! Think I'm getting the hang of this now. I've got my finger on the pulse.

03:42

Ah, thumb!

03:44

Anyway, Sally.. she's a complete pain.

03:47

Ahh, you two not getting along?

03:48

As I said, a complete pain. In capitals I think.

03:57

So David, could you tell us a bit more about the University's social media policy and who it applies to.

04:02

The University's social media policy applies to all staff, and covers all professional and personal communications which directly or indirectly reference the University. There is a separate policy which applies to students. The policy reflects the current views of the courts, namely that the critical issue is that it doesn't matter whether the message you send is sent during work hours from your work PC, or outside of core working hours from your own devices at home. The critical thing is whether the content references your employer or colleagues. Staff need to be aware of the permanence of information they post on social media and the lack of control they will have over that content.

04:56

Rob, mate, I've just seen your latest post about swimming classes. Sally's swimming classes.

05:05

Yeah [laughs] people are really liking this one. What's funny is Sally can't even swim! [mimes feeble attempt at drowning]

05:14

How many posts is that now though mate? Don't you think that's getting a bit personal?

05:18

Naaah, it's just a bit of gossip. Sally's not my 'friend' on my Facebook anyway.

05:23

Okay... umm look you do realise you've not changed your Facebook privacy settings.

05:30

Privacy settings? errr no, I mean, well I meant to, but it'll be fine.

05:37

Everyone can see what you've posted. Your entire Facebook page.

05:42

You worry too much honestly. It'll be fine.

05:54

It's important to realise that any material posted online may reach a wider audience than intended or expected. In the scenario, even though Rob isn't friends with Sally on Facebook he should have realised that his postings may get back to her; irrespective of his privacy settings. The nature of Facebook and the internet is it's very easy for comments you post about someone to reach others.

06:22

So one of the ways myself and I know many of my colleagues I know, utilise social media is at conferences, where often we'll tweet about what's happening or the discussions that are taking place. What happens if I make a mistake and I tweet something that's inaccurate?

06:34

The informal nature of many social media communications is that people take less care than they would usually about the accuracy of the information they're posting or issues such as confidentiality. So I think it's important that employees bear this in mind.

06:49

Does that mean we also need to think about the Data Protection Act when we're using social media?

06:54

Yes, the Data Protection Act 1998 does apply to social media and therefore if your communication references the University in any way or your role at the University, it's important you take into account the guidance of the University's data protection policy which is also referenced at the end of this film.

07:11

So, as we've already discussed, I use social media extensively within my professional life and one of the things that concerns me is that I might post something that a member of the public might take offence at. Can you give me any advice on that?

07:25

The University's policy is to deal with all complaints from members of the public seriously, but each case will be decided on its merits. If the University

has any concerns about your posting then ultimately they may ask you to take it down.

07:48

Swimming tonight then is it Sally?

07:50

Oh don't start!

07:52

Sorry

07:53

It's the whole Facebook thing.

07:55

What Facebook thing?

07:56

Oh I thought you knew... the 'swimming' comment.

08:00

It's the swimming kit, bit of a give-away.

08:04

Oh [laughs]

08:05

Need a chat?

08:07

It's Rob.

08:09

Okaaaay.

08:10

He's just posting stuff about me on Facebook.

08:15

Unpleasant stuff? Bad stuff?

08:17

[groans] playground stuff. It's probably cos of the promotion.

08:22

Okay. Well I think the first thing we need to do is make it clear to Rob that his behaviour isn't acceptable. I can have a chat with him if you like? If you don't feel comfortable having the conversation yourself?

08:31

No, no. It's ok, it's ok. It's obvious really. I feel better just talking to someone about it.

08:38

Ok. Well you don't have to do it by yourself. I can have a colleague in there with you if you like. It may well be that Rob isn't aware that his behaviour's inappropriate, offensive and well distressing for you... I mean this is Rob we're talking about.

08:51

Yeah.

08:52

I'm sure when he realises that his behaviour's unacceptable, that he'll you know, think better of it and stop.

08:57

I'll have a chat with him tomorrow.

08:59

Okay, well let me know how it goes.

09:01

Yeah, ok. I'm gonna ask him what's he got about swimming anyway!

09:04

Seriously though, the University doesn't accept any form of bullying or harassment by members of the University staff. If talking doesn't help, come back and I'll back you up with the correct procedure, and HR if it comes to that.

09:17

Thanks.

09:18

No problem.

09:19

Night.

09:20

Night.

09:31

So it seems from the scenario we've just seen that Sally is being bullied by Rob. Can social media posts be classed as bullying?

09:37

Yes. Cyberbullying is really any form of bullying that can take place on social media or on a mobile phone. And really it's behaviour that's designed to harass or humiliate someone. Examples could be spreading lies or malicious gossip; mocking them; aggressive or intimidating behaviour; or perhaps posting inappropriate photographs.

10:01

So David, tell me what an employer would typically do about breaches of its social media policy?

10:05

Well, it all depends, but if the behaviours amount to bullying then this is likely to be considered a disciplinary issue; whether that takes place in person or online. This is all covered in the social media policy, but also in linked policies the University has, such as its policy on Dignity and its Disciplinary Policy.

I would add that the courts have shown, to date, that they take a very strict approach to situations involving misconduct relating to the abuse of social media. The scenario highlights that it's common for people to talk about work issues on social media. The problems arises when, like Rob, his negative comments relate to the University or to individuals working for it.

10:48

Thank you David. So it's important to remember that social media is very much a part of our lives these days. Whilst of course there are huge benefits associated with it, there are challenges and risks too. Here are some well documented examples of where people have got into hot water with their use of social media and also some examples of very positive use.