

DWP sackings reinforce need for robust social media policy

Posted by Sandra Beale, director of SJ Beale HR Consult in [Managing people](#), [Technology](#) on Thu, 10/01/2013 - 11:39

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It has just been revealed under a Freedom of Information Act request that 11 civil servants at Iain Duncan Smith's [Department for Work and Pensions](#) have been sacked for using [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#), with 116 DWP employees who have faced disciplinary action for blogging and social networking offences since 2009 and been issued with a variety of warnings.

The DWP said use of Twitter, Facebook and other social media sites was "completely restricted" for most of its workers. The only employees allowed to use the sites are those who have a "genuine requirement for access".

This news shows [how important it is for organisations to have a robust social media policy](#) in place as part of their employee handbook. By having a written policy on using social networking, an organisation can help protect itself against liability.

A well-written policy can give clear guidelines to managers and employees on what is acceptable and help provide definition between private and work lives. An employer should encourage responsible use of social media if access is provided to social networking websites.

However, employees also need to know that their employer will look at all their postings in accordance with data protection monitoring rules and should be aware of these consequences. A clear link to disciplinary policy is essential with guidance on how it will be applied.

A policy should encourage good practice and include details on network security, acceptable behaviour on the use of internet, emails, hand-held technology, the use of privacy settings and the use of blogging, tweeting and online chat rooms.

<http://www.hrzone.co.uk/topic/managing-people/blog-dwp-sackings-reinforce-need-robust-social-media-policy/126301>

Issues of confidentiality and a ban on representing the organisation when not permitted to do so should also be covered as well the use of company logo and branding. Guidance on the avoidance of harassing, obscene, defamatory, threatening, or other offensive content in all social networking should also be included.

It is important to point out the requirement not to criticise or damage the organisation's reputation in any way.

Social media is here to stay so confident businesses need to set the ground rules on behaviour. If used in a negative way social media can be an enemy, but if used in a positive manner, as it was originally designed to do, supported by a robust policy, it can be used to harness employee engagement.

By having a social media policy in place, it can provide defence at an employment tribunal and mitigate any risk for employer and employee.

Sandra Beale is director of HR consultancy, [SJ Beale HR Consult](#).

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