

Social Media policy

1. Policy Statement

1.1 We recognise that the internet provides unique opportunities to network and to participate in interactive discussions and share information on particular topics using a wide variety of social media, including but not limited to:

1.1.1 Facebook;

1.1.2 microblogging sites (such as Twitter);

1.1.3 LinkedIn and other corporate social networking platforms;

1.1.4 blogs;

1.1.5 video and photo sharing websites such as YouTube, Flickr, Instagram and Pinterest;

1.1.6 forums and comment spaces on websites; and

1.1.7 message and discussion boards.

This policy is intended to help our people make appropriate decisions about the use of such social media.

1.2 The use of social media can pose risks to the Firm's confidential and proprietary information, and reputation, and can jeopardise our compliance with legal and regulatory obligations. To minimise these risks, we expect everyone to adhere to this policy.

1.3 This policy outlines the standards we require our people to observe when using social media, and the action we will take in relation to breaches of this policy.

1.4 This policy supplements our IT policy, which can also be found on the intranet. This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and may be amended at any time.

2. Who is covered by the policy?

This policy covers all individuals working at all levels in the Firm, including partners and directors, employees, consultants, trainees, part-time and fixed-term employees, casual and agency staff (collectively referred to as **our people** in this policy).

3. The scope of the policy

3.1 This policy applies to the use of social media for both business and personal purposes, whether during office hours or otherwise. This policy applies regardless of whether the social media is accessed using our IT facilities and equipment or equipment belonging to our people.

3.2 Breach of this policy may be dealt with under our disciplinary procedure and, in serious cases, may be treated as gross misconduct leading to summary dismissal.

Disciplinary action may be taken regardless of whether the breach has occurred during working hours, and regardless of whether our equipment or facilities were used for the purpose of committing the breach. Anyone suspected of committing a breach of this policy will be required to co-operate with our investigation, which may involve handing over relevant passwords and login details.

3.3 We may require our people to remove internet postings which are deemed to constitute a breach of this policy. Failure to comply with such a request may itself result in disciplinary action.

4. **Responsibility for implementing the policy**

4.1 The managing partner has overall responsibility for this policy, but has delegated day to day responsibility for its operation to the HR Director.

4.2 The HR Director is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy and making recommendations for changes to minimize risks to the Firm.

4.3 All of our people are responsible for their own compliance with this policy and for ensuring that it is consistently applied. Everyone should ensure that they take the time to read and understand it. Any breach of policy should be reported to the HR Director.

4.4 Questions regarding the content or application of this policy should be directed to the HR Director.

5. **Risks**

The use of social media (whether for corporate purposes or personal) presents a number of risks to the Firm, its people and clients. To minimize these risks all social media accounts operated by the Firm are regularly monitored to ensure that our duty of confidentiality is not breached. These risks include:

5.1 defamation – the law of defamation extends to comments made on social media sites (and the internet generally) and careful thought should be given to postings made on these sites, whether made in a corporate capacity or otherwise;

5.2 confidentiality – we are under a duty to keep Firm and client information confidential. Use of social media increases the risk that confidential information may be disclosed (whether inadvertently or otherwise);

5.3 security – passwords should be kept secure and screens locked/computers logged out of any social media when not in use (whether using Firm equipment or otherwise);

5.4 privacy - whether using social media for personal or corporate purposes, a site's privacy settings should always be reviewed to ensure that individuals are in control of who can access their information. Some privacy settings (for example on Twitter and Facebook) are automatically set to share information and may change with or without the user's knowledge. Our people are responsible for ensuring that these are adjusted and should regularly check such settings to ensure that they remain adequate and unchanged;

5.5 control – once information is posted via social media it is very difficult to control how (and how quickly) that information is shared. Content that may be regretted later should not be posted. For example, there are existing processes to deal with grievances and these should not be aired through social media; and

5.6 reputational – content posted on social media has the potential to harm the reputation of the Firm and our people (for example, posting negative comments about a third party that may be a client or a prospect of the Firm or comment on current affairs which affect or involve a client or a prospect).

6. **Corporate use of social media**

- 6.1 Social media can offer many commercial benefits to the Firm and allows us to communicate and promote our services across a much wider geographical platform than ever before. However, it is important that our people have an awareness of the risks of using social media in a corporate context. In particular, it is important to note that the same ethical considerations apply in an online environment, and to avoid the blurring of the lines between personal and professional use.
- 6.2 The Firm currently uses LinkedIn and Twitter for the purpose of promoting the business. Under no circumstances should our people be using other platforms, such as Facebook, to communicate with clients or prospects, unless specifically authorised to do so by the Director of Business Development.
- 6.3 If our people are required to represent the Firm via social media, they must:
- 6.3.1 have sought and gained prior approval to do so from the Director of Business Development;
 - 6.3.2 have read and understood this policy;
 - 6.3.3 comply with this policy and any additional guidance that the Firm may issue from time to time relating to use of social media;
 - 6.3.4 ensure that the account is only used for the purposes agreed by the Firm;
 - 6.3.5 follow any guidance issued by the Firm relating to the set-up of such an account (including but not limited to use of the Firm's branding, usernames and any guidelines on conduct); and
 - 6.3.6 have undertaken any training required by the Firm.
- 6.4 If you are contacted for comments about the Firm for publication anywhere, including in any social media outlet, direct the enquiry to the Director of Business Development and do not respond without approval.
- 6.5 Any profiles, groups and contacts/connections built up via a corporate social media account during employment with the Firm are the confidential information of the Firm. Our people may be required to return and/or delete such information upon the termination of their employment (however arising) with the Firm. Any LinkedIn groups created or used for the benefit of the Firm are not the personal property of our people and on leaving the Firm, our people must transfer any owner/manager rights to such groups to the Director of Business Development.
- 6.6 On leaving the Firm all of our people are required to sign undertakings confirming that any social media profiles listing their employment or involvement with the Firm are updated within 7 days of leaving to reflect the termination of their employment.
- 6.7 We may use internet searches to perform due diligence on candidates in the course of recruitment. Where we do this, we will act in accordance with our general data protection and equality obligations.
- 6.8 Our people are encouraged to think carefully before connecting to staff at other competing firms as there is a risk that they may have access to information about the Firm's clients. It is the responsibility of our people to ensure that their LinkedIn account is set to "only you can see your connections".
- 7. Use of personal social media accounts**

- 7.1 We understand that many of our people choose to communicate with friends and colleagues via personal social media accounts or blogs in their own time and we have no problem with the use of such accounts.
- 7.2 Individuals are personally responsible for any content they publish and must not give the impression that the content represents the views or opinions of the Firm. Should they publish content that involves the Firm or individuals associated with it, they should include a clear statement that the postings are the account holder's and are in no way associated with the Firm. The use of the Firm's logos or other corporate artwork is not permitted.
- 7.3 Any account that is used inappropriately in a way that damages the Firm, its reputation, its people or its clients/prospects in any way will be investigated by the HR Director and appropriate action taken (which may include deletion of content and/or disciplinary action).

8. **Monitoring use of social media websites**

- 8.1 Our people should be aware that any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for work purposes) may be monitored and, where breaches of this policy are found, action may be taken under our disciplinary procedure.
- 8.2 Monitoring is only carried out to the extent permitted or as required by law and as necessary and justifiable for business purposes.
- 8.3 Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give rise to legal liability against you and us. It may also cause embarrassment to us and to our clients.
- 8.4 In particular uploading, forwarding or posting a link to any of the following types of material on a social media website, whether in a professional or personal capacity, will amount to gross misconduct (this list is not exhaustive):
- 8.4.1 pornographic material;
 - 8.4.2 a false and/or defamatory statement about any person or organisation;
 - 8.4.3 material which is offensive, obscene, criminal discriminatory, derogatory or may cause embarrassment to us, our clients or our people;
 - 8.4.4 confidential information about us or any of our clients or our people (which you do not have express authority to disseminate);
 - 8.4.5 any other statement which is likely to create any liability (whether criminal or civil, and whether for you or us); or
 - 8.4.6 material in breach of copyright or other intellectual property rights, or which invades the privacy of any person.

Any such action will be addressed under the disciplinary procedure and is likely to result in summary dismissal.

9. **Responsible use of social media**

- 9.1 Social media should never be used in a way that breaches any of our other policies. In addition to the guidelines set out at 7.3 above, our people are prohibited from using social media in a way that:
- 9.1.1 breaches any obligations they may have relating to confidentiality;

- 9.1.2 defames or disparages the Firm or its affiliates, clients, business partners, other stakeholders or competitors;
 - 9.1.3 breaches our equality, diversity and inclusion policy;
 - 9.1.4 breaches our respect and responsibility at work policy (and in particular shall not carry out any activity that may constitute harassment or bullying of colleagues);
 - 9.1.5 breaches our data protection policy (for example, never disclose personal information about a colleague online);
 - 9.1.6 breaches the terms of the social media platform you are using (for example by creating accounts in the name of parties other than yourself);
 - 9.1.7 breaches the Solicitors' Code of Conduct or SRA Handbook as is in force from time to time.
- 9.2 If you notice any use of social media by others which disparages or reflects poorly on the Firm, or is otherwise in breach of this policy, please report it to the HR Director. The HR Director will investigate any such use and will take appropriate action, including where appropriate, formal action in accordance with the Firm's disciplinary policy. Each of our people is responsible for protecting our business reputation.