

A successful policy should consider the following risks:

- potential unauthorised disclosure of confidential information
- infringement of third-party intellectual property rights
- unlawful harassment of employees, especially where explicit material is downloaded or sent by email
- reputational damage from inappropriate emails
- time-wasting and loss of productivity.

It is highly likely that the majority of staff in the workplace will use some form of social media. Improper use of such platforms will reflect poorly on the practice and could impact profitability. Conversely, this can prove to be a useful driver of business by marketing to a much wider audience than may otherwise be achieved. A well-drafted social media policy should consider the attitudes of the practice and, particularly, where its use is to be encouraged. Detailed guidelines for this use should be put in place, in addition to the generalised policy.

Data protection is at the forefront of the minds of many practice owners (and employees for that matter) following the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) last May. Processing personal data will be lawful only if – and to the extent that – at least one of the conditions in article 6 of the GDPR is met. In addition, employers can only process personal data for employment purposes if it is necessary and, when the processing is carried out, the employer has an appropriate policy in place.

The data protection policy is also a suitable place to provide a privacy statement to staff members, notifying them about how their personal data is handled. This policy should be carefully drafted and tailored to the actual or anticipated data collected, privacy and security procedures of the practice.

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An essential resource

The practice handbook should be considered a vital document because it:

- sets out what is expected of employees and deals with the consequences of not meeting these expectations
- helps to reduce workplace disputes – whether between staff or against the practice – by ensuring everyone is ‘singing from the same hymn sheet’. However, always ensure you avoid policies and procedures to which you do not adhere
- reduces the time practice owners or practice managers spend on dealing with staffing issues, such as disputes and explaining standards to ‘new starters’
- provides an effective method of communicating to new staff members their working conditions, benefits, annual leave, dress code, pay rises or reviews, training
- is required for – or assists with – complying with employment laws and can be a beneficial legal defence against an employee claim.

Whilst the above is by no means an exhaustive list of the policies, it provides an overview of some of the issues that should be considered when thinking about implementing or updating a practice handbook. ■

PPD Questions

1. Which of the following policies must legally be supplied to employees?
 - A. Grievance and Social Media
 - B. Equal Opportunities and Absence
 - C. Disciplinary and Grievance
 - D. Electronic Devices and Pensions.
2. What is the minimum number of employees a practice can have before it needs a Health and Safety policy?
 - A. 10
 - B. five
 - C. a practice always needs a Health and Safety policy
 - D. 20.
3. A practice handbook is a valuable resource as it:
 - A. communicates rules and procedures effectively to employees
 - B. is required by law
 - C. prevents employees from submitting an employment claim
 - D. assists with workplace disputes.

Answers
1.C 2.B 3.A & D

References

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