

Exeter Law School's Racism Scandal Holds Lessons for Law Firms

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Exeter Exposed

Early last week, a student at the University of Exeter Law School shook the internet by sharing photographic evidence of a group chat, populated by a few of his peers and rife with explicit racial slurs and discriminatory statements, among other violent and vitriolic texts. Arsalan Montavali, the courageous student who decided to come forward and publicly denounce his peers for their racist behavior, called upon the University of Exeter, and the various organizations within it which these students belonged to and served as leaders of (especially the Braxton Law Society, for which several of the perpetrators served on the leadership board), to take disciplinary action. [Montavali, pointing to an existing "serious race problem"](#) within the university, stressed the importance of implementing discipline for these individuals as a means to establish a precedent for posterity.

The University of Exeter issued a rapid response, ensuring those concerned that investigations were being conducted and that disciplinary action would be taken. Shortly after, the disciplinary action was enacted: the five individuals responsible for the hateful comments throughout the group chat were not just suspended from present and future involvement in the coveted Braxton Law Society, but suspended from law school, as well. [All of the students involved in the hateful](#) WhatsApp messages had existing employment offers or contacts. In an extremely significant manifestation of intolerance for racist and violent statements, all of these offers were rescinded once the group messages came to light.

What implications do a volatile incident of racism at a British law school hold for law firms across the world? This question is answered not just via analysis of the incident itself, but of the chain reaction of responses that followed its revelation.

What This Means for your Law Firm

First and foremost, this incident speaks to the importance of vetting all employment candidates thoroughly prior to extending employment offers. Of course, most people don't make their hateful and racist comments easily found on their Facebook profiles. However, in a world where social media has rendered [very little of our private lives thoroughly and completely private](#), it's extremely worthwhile—and we'd even wager necessary—to comb through applicants' social media presences in order to ensure that the ways in which they reflect your firm are positive.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that questionable behavior occurs on university and college campuses across the world. Due to the highly saturated scandal market on social media, it is relatively rare for a specific mishap on university campuses to reach such worldwide significance as this one, so chances are that most legal professionals won't need to heed the following advice—but you never know. Should either of your alma maters, undergraduate or post-graduate, be caught in a media firestorm (be it major or minor) over racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise hateful behavior, it is advisable that you immediately issue a statement condemning these actions. This will reassure your clients of your ethical fortitude, and it will prevent that (rightful) condemnations of the perpetrators within your alma mater reflect negatively on your law firm.

Conclusion

In this day and age, investigating any prospective employees is an integral aspect of any law firm's hiring process. Although it does not guarantee that any questionable or hateful behavior is uncovered, it reduces the chances that your firm might extend an employment offer to someone [who does not reflect its ethics and values](#). To say that the principles of equality and justice have been upheld imperfectly by the law over the course of history is an understatement. However, in a world where, due to the prevalence of social media, transparency levels are unprecedented, we have never had a better chance to hold those who stand in the way of those ideas accountable.

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National Law Review, Volume VIII, Number 85

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