

# Public Service to check social media usage when recruiting

Prospective candidates looking for employment in the public service will now be vetted on their use of social media and the internet.



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The additional reference checking is intended to ensure that government's recruitment processes are enhanced beyond the traditional means of screening.

Until now, the traditional reference checking was limited to include criminal records, citizenship verification, financial record checks, qualification checks as well as previous employment checks.

A circular outlining social media referencing, which has been sent to all government departments by the Department of Public Service and Administration, is not prescriptive but advisory in nature, Minister Ayanda Dlodlo said on Wednesday.

Dlodlo said the public service has an obligation to ensure that all those recruited into the system fit with the legislative and policy prescripts of government, which is now moving towards professionalising the system and building a new organisational culture in line with the National Development Plan prescripts.

“In order for us to recruit individuals that meet the above prescripts, we need to employ all tools and methodologies of screening, including the use of internet and social media in particular,” the Minister explained.

Dlodlo, however, cautioned that this circular does not seek to restrict the constitutional rights to privacy of any individual or group of people seeking employment in the public service.

Moreover, it does not seek to “suppress or muzzle any ideological or political views of people whatsoever – neither is it designed to disadvantage South Africans on the basis of party political affiliation”.

Dlodlo emphasized that departments who exercise the option of broadening their verification through the internet should obtain the consent of the candidate concerned.

“We are fully aware of the constitutional obligations on privacy of every individual and the fact that government is still seized with the task of developing a policy on internet use. That is why it is important to obtain the consent of the candidate when such web searches are being conducted,” she said.

Research around the world indicates that the use of internet and social media has helped organisations both in identifying exceptional talent and in other instances, avoiding negligent hiring.

For example, a Career Builder Survey of 2018 indicates that 33% of employers found content that made them more likely to hire the employee and 23% found information that led to the direct hiring of applicants.

Dlodlo said this proves that such online content can be an employee’s best advocate.

The Minister was at pains to assure prospective candidates that they would not be prejudiced for their refusal to consent to a web search on their profile.

“This recruitment practice is not a mechanism to prejudice people. It is an international trend in recruitment and as a country aspiring to digitise its systems and use social media as an empowering tool, it is time that we embraced such practices,” Dlodlo said.

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