

## Derby pornography cases spark fears over employee privacy

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Derby University's employees are worried about the monitoring of their communication and about what could get them fired, after six lecturers were suspended for looking at pornography. The cases of all but one of the lecturers have now been settled.

Administrators found pornographic material on six lecturers' computers, and all were immediately suspended. Two lecturers resigned immediately, two have been disciplined but returned to work and the inquiry into one lecturer is still outstanding because of illness. The sixth lecturer was exonerated after an investigation.

Derby's code of conduct for all computer users reserves the right to "access contentious material" and states that anyone downloading pornographic or violent matter will be disciplined.

But some Derby lecturers are concerned about the university monitoring their private communication and say they do not know exactly what is acceptable. The worry is that material could be sent to someone without their permission, either from other individuals or from companies who have obtained someone's email address.

"There's been a lot of anxiety. People are unsure about the implications of this, and have been editing the emails they send to each other as a result. But the biggest problem has been the lack of information coming from the university," said one professor who did not want to be named.

The issue of pornography at work is something all employers are having to face up to. In the autumn, four different London companies suspended staff after similar incidents involving sending and receiving pornographic emails or downloading sexual Simpsons pictures.

The university insists that its policy on inappropriate use of the web has always been publicly available. As was shown by the exoneration of one lecturer, the discovery of inappropriate material will not lead automatically to punishment: the circumstances will be examined.

"For obvious reasons, we cannot comment on individual cases, but you do know what is inappropriate. And to be honest, if I had to look at pornography for real work reasons, I would check with someone else to be safe," a university spokesperson said.

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