# A Simple Guide to Email Communication Guidelines and Protocols

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## 1.    Introduction

1.1    E-mail can be an effective way of sharing information and managing work across a large organisation.  However, there are some instances where the use of e-mail may not be the most appropriate method of communication. This document is a simple guide to our University's expectations in terms of e-mail good practice and it also sets out protocols for its use.

Outlined in the next section is detailed advice and guidance around use of email, but we have prefaced that with our top 5 tips for email communication here:

- **E-mail is not always the best form of communication**
  If you have a really important issue or you are upset with someone, e-mailing is often not the best answer. If necessary speak to the person directly, rather than through an e-mail. Don't say anything you wouldn't say in person; it is always worth reminding ourselves about the importance of being polite and our values of being professional and respectful.
- **Make the title relevant**
  Many people ignore the title of an e-mail. If the subject changes don't keep using an old "re: irrelevant title" A good title increases the chance that people will actually read your e-mail, rather than just leaving it for later.
- **Don't ignore basic English**
  Keep e-mails brief, but don't completely ignore the basic use of grammar and spelling. If you haven't time to respond properly, wait until you do.
- **Keep it short**
  E-mails can be brief and to the point. If the message has to be long, make sure it is broken up in to different sections, which are easy to read. This is good for both the sender and the recipient. If any action is required, make it clear.
- **Be careful about replying to all**
  Make sure you know the difference between replying to one person and replying to everyone on the initial message. Only send to those to whom the message is relevant.

## 2.    Good Practice

2.1    When to use e-mail

- Before sending an e-mail, consider whether it is the best way to communicate.  A face-to-face conversation or a telephone call may be better.
- Consider the time when sending an e-mail – if an e-mail is sent to colleagues out of working hours; indicate whether a response is required.  It is better practice to draft the e-mail and to send it the next working day.  Urgent business may be more effectively dealt with by telephone. Other communication channels are available for disseminating information to large numbers of staff such as School/Service newsletters and our staff website.

- Messages to University e-mail mailing lists are restricted to University business. Our University's Classified Ads provide a forum for non-work related messages.
- Limit the number of recipients to whom you send a message to those who need to know about it – only copy in those who need to be informed.
- The 'Reply to all' function should only be used if it is necessary for all recipients to receive your response.
- The Outlook Calendar functions (such as Scheduling Assistant) can be used when arranging meetings.

## 2.2 E-mail Signatures

- E-mail signatures, covering basic information such as name, job title and contact details including extension number, should be used on all initial e-mails. Responses to e-mails received may carry a shorter signature (name and telephone number).

## 2.3 E-mail Distribution

- Mailing lists provide useful groupings and they should be used when targeting messages at certain staff groups. However, mailing lists should not be used as a means of 'spamming' colleagues.
- E-mails intended for distribution to all staff within a School/Service must be approved by the Dean/Director of the School/Service, prior to sending.
- E-mails intended for distribution to all University staff must be approved by a member of Senior Management Team.  Messages to all University staff are restricted to matters of strategic importance and/or urgent operational matters.
- Where there is a need to cascade information throughout our University, communication channels such as the staff website, School/Service newsletters, or the VC's newsletter should be used. If the message is not suitable for any of the above channels, cascade should be sought via the Senior Management Team.
- The 'Bcc' function should be used when sending bulk e-mail. By using this function, the privacy of the recipient is respected and their e-mail address is not shared without their permission.

## 2.4 Making E-mail Content and Action clear

- The purpose of the e-mail should be clear.  It may be appropriate to state whether the e-mail is for action or information.  If action is required, it is helpful to address this directly and also, to indicate a date the action should be completed by. This can be done automatically by using the 'Follow up' option when creating the e-mail.
- It is generally expected that e-mails that are sent directly 'To' someone, require some sort of action.  The 'Cc' function, should be used to inform individuals of the message content.

- The subject title should clarify the content of the e-mail and summarise the message. The recipient should clearly be able to identify what the e-mail is about from viewing the subject title.
- Please don't say anything by e-mail that you wouldn't say face to face or via any other channel.
- Remember the importance of punctuation and grammar for the reader. E-mail should not be exempt from the good use of English.
- Provide contextual information at the beginning of an e-mail as it should not be assumed that the recipient will know the background to the issue/matter being raised.
- E-mails should be concise. If an e-mail is part of a longer chain of e-mails, always consider deleting any irrelevant text and only forwarding on information which is relevant and appropriate to the recipient in tone and content.
- Only request confirmation of receipt of an e-mail if it is essential to know whether an e-mail has been received and read; if you know the e-mail you have received is important, let the sender know that the message is received and understood.

2.5    Forwarding and Replying to E-mails

- When forwarding or replying to e-mails, the same rules should be applied as when initiating an e-mail, in terms of stating a clear subject title and identifying any necessary actions
- When forwarding on e-mails, care should be taken to check that the information is not confidential and that it can be shared with other recipients. Outlook allows users to set the sensitivity of an e-mail, and recipients should respect the setting.

2.6    Files Sizes & Managing Inboxes

- When sending attachments via e-mail, avoid sending large files, where possible, as they may clog up the inbox of the recipient(s). Alternative file sharing methods such as the Public Folders or shared drives should be considered.
- The body of the e-mail should clearly identify what attachments are being sent.
- To manage inboxes effectively, personal and/or shared folders should be used to store read e-mails in, as appropriate.
- Teams are encouraged to use generic e-mail addresses or e-mail groups for the purpose of general enquiries which all team members can access e.g. admissions@leedsbeckett.ac.uk or HRIS@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

2.7    Out of Office Replies

- Out of office replies should be used when staff are unable to respond to e-mails for more than one working day. An out of office reply should include the date(s) of unavailability and the name and contact details of an alternative contact, in the event that a query is urgent.

## 3.    E-mail Protocols

3.1    Ownership, Responsibility and Security

3.1.1 E-mail is a communications facility provided by Leeds Beckett University to support the effective operation of our University's business.  The content of all e-mails stored on University servers and University computers is and remains the property of our University.

3.1.2 E-mail is not a private or confidential medium. Emails should not be sent on a private or confidential basis which raise issues concerning other members of staff without the understanding that the email will be disclosable to the individual(s) concerned and may be investigated more widely.  Careful consideration should be given to the content of e-mails and whether the contents would reflect well on our University and in particular, it should be ensured that all contents are accurate and appropriate for dissemination by e-mail.   In the event that it is deemed necessary to disable an e-mail account immediately, we reserve the right to action this without prior notice.

3.1.3 The security of e-mail accounts is the responsibility of the individual user and precautions must be taken to prevent unauthorised access.  Details of usernames and/or passwords must not be disclosed to others.  Users need to be vigilant of possible fraudulent e-mails and are reminded that our University will never ask employees to disclose password information.

3.2    Monitoring

3.2.1 Whilst it is not University policy or practice to actively monitor the content of e-mails, our University employs an e-mail filtering service which prevents unwanted and inappropriate material from being received.  In addition, our University reserves the right to retrieve content for legitimate reasons including, but not limited to, reclaiming lost or misdirected messages, assisting with complaint and disciplinary investigations, responding to requests made under the Freedom of Information Act and recovering from system failure.

3.3    Personal Use

3.3.1 Use of e-mail for personal reasons is acceptable provided that the usage is minimal and that it takes place outside of core working hours.  Such usage must not conflict with University rules, regulations and agreements including our Equality and Diversity policy, and it should not interfere with an employee's ability to carry out their normal work.    The Joint Academic NETwork (JANET) Acceptable Use Policy governs the transmission of e-mails sent outside of our University and users are required to comply with the provisions of this agreement as well as the standards set out within this document.

3.3.2 Disclaimer

Our University, the sender, or both can be made liable for the content of an e-mail. Our University, like many organisations, uses an e-mail disclaimer to inform recipients of the University's position in relation to the information being e-mailed. The disclaimer is automatically included in e-mails sent to recipients outside of our University.

3.4 Restrictions

3.4.1 E-mail must not be used for unlawful activities; commercial purposes unless carried out on behalf of our University; personal financial gain; or any other activity which contravenes University regulations.

3.4.2 Offensive and other inappropriate material

E-mail must not be used to transmit material which is or could be perceived as being obscene or pornographic or racist, sexist or discriminatory or offensive in any other way. The question of what constitutes offensive material is not one for the sender to determine, it is the effect on the recipient which is important. In light of this, the circulation of e-mails containing offensive language or images is strictly prohibited. Where material which could be considered offensive is being transmitted for legitimate academic reasons, care must be taken to ensure that the legitimacy is established and 'visible'.

3.5 Induction and New Starters

3.5.1 Managers should ensure that any induction programme includes guidance on the use of e-mail and that new starters are directed to this document and asked to familiarise themselves with it.

3.6 Leavers

3.6.1 It is the policy of our University to end access to all IT systems associated with employment including e-mail accounts immediately after the last date of employment. It is therefore recommended that employees take action prior to their date of leaving to get their correspondence in order, as access will automatically expire upon leaving.

3.7 Disciplinary Offence

3.7.1 Misuse of University e-mail accounts constitutes misconduct and may result in disciplinary action being taken against the individual(s) concerned. Further details of our University's Disciplinary Rules and Procedure are available on the HR webpages.