

Email and Messaging Policy

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**HERIOT-WATT UNIVERSITY
EMAIL AND MESSAGING POLICY AND GUIDANCE
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1. INTRODUCTION

This policy sets out the University's expectations for how employees and other people working for or on behalf of the University Group should use email and other electronic communications. We are all responsible for using these tools appropriately to support effective and collaborative working and create accurate and accountable records of actions and decisions.

This policy recognises that we work in a continuously evolving technological environment. Any communications we send in the course of our work for the University, whether by email, text messages, social network posts, group chat and messaging applications are subject to the same legal requirements that govern any other recorded information.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

When using email or messaging applications in University communications, all colleagues are expected to

- Communicate with courtesy and respect at all times, in accordance with the University's values:
 - *Belong to a diverse, inclusive and international community working together across boundaries and cultures*
 - *Inspire curiosity to learn and find solutions that transform lives*
 - *Collaborate by working in partnership to shape the future whilst taking responsibility for our own actions*
 - *Celebrate excellence and take pride in the achievements of our students, staff and alumni*
- Use the communications medium appropriate for the purpose, the information to be conveyed and the action needed
- Share enough information with the right people in a timely manner
- Show consideration for your recipients: they have commitments and deadlines of their own
- Understand that anything recorded in communications on University business may need to be disclosed - either under Freedom of Information (FOI) and data protection law (including requests by individuals for data about them (Data Subject Request or DSR) or in a court of law
- Protect personal data and other confidential information by following our [information security standards](#)
- Check your recipients before you send or post each message to avoid accidental oversharing
- Follow the University's [Email Guidance](#)

3. SCOPE

This policy applies to

- All colleagues and other people contracted to work for or on behalf of organisations within the University Group, including members of the governing body

- All University campuses and all locations from which we send or receive communications in the course of our work for the University, including home use.
- All text and images or recordings sent by all means of electronic communications on University business including email, text messages, social network and media posts, blogs and group messaging applications, whether using a University account or a personal account

4. LINES OF RESPONSIBILITY

4.1 **Everyone** who communicates in the course of their work is individually accountable for how and what they communicate.

4.2 The lines of responsibility for colleagues in specific roles for implementing, monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of this policy and guidance are as set out in the University's [Data Protection Policy](#).

5. RELATED POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND FURTHER REFERENCE

5.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with all other University information governance policies, are published on the University website at [Our policies | Heriot-Watt University](#)

5.2 **Legal Requirements and external standards**

Details of legislation that places specific obligations on organisations in relation to managing information in emails, messages and other records, together with relevant definitions, can be found in the [Information Security Policy Framework](#)

Information Governance staff can advise on specific legal and regulatory requirements affecting email and electronic communications.

6. FURTHER HELP AND ADVICE

Information Governance
 Telephone: 0131 451 3274/3219
 Email: Infogov@hw.ac.uk

Human Resources Development
 Email: HRHelp@hw.ac.uk

7. POLICY VERSION AND HISTORY

Version No	Date of Approval	Approving Authority	Brief Description of Amendment
V2.3 27/04/2019		University Executive	University values listed in policy.

APPENDIX

EMAIL AND MESSAGING GUIDANCE

1. COMMUNICATIONS AND THE LAW

All e-mails and other electronic messages or posts are legally discoverable in response to an FOI or Data Protection request (for example a Data Subject Request) or in a court of law.

Emails and messages have the same authority as any other communication to or from our University. Binding contracts can inadvertently be created via e-mail.

Avoid abrupt, inappropriate, flippant and inconsiderate use of language which may come across as bullying or defamation.

Information in electronic communications may contain vital evidence as records of decisions, agreements and commitments made on behalf of the University and must be managed accordingly to uphold our rights and meet our obligations.

Always use your Heriot-Watt account for all email and other communications you send in the course of your work, for security and business continuity and to confirm who you represent. Be aware that if you choose to use a personal account to communicate for work, these messages are also legally discoverable.

If you don't name someone in an email or message about them it doesn't make that communication exempt from disclosure – just a lot harder to find in the legal deadline (One calendar month for Data subject requests).

Save important emails where they will be accessible to colleagues who have a business need to see them. Email is a communications tool, not a file store. Apply the University [records retention policies](#) and delete no longer relevant or out-of-date emails and messages as soon as they are no longer required.

2 COMMUNICATE SECURELY

Protect confidential information

If you have to send confidential information by email, encrypt or protect the data with a strong password and telephone the recipient to give them the password. Avoid emailing the password wherever possible.

If you use a mobile device for communications the device must be encrypted and protected with a strong passkey.

Check before you press “send”

Check your recipients' names and addresses before you press the send button. Check and where necessary delete the email trail before sending, to ensure that it doesn't contain any information that shouldn't be disclosed to the intended recipient. Most breaches of security arise from inadvertently sending emails and other communications to the wrong people.

Beware of Phishing

Be cautious about opening email attachments. If in doubt forward the email to abuse@hw.ac.uk. Never respond to email, text or phone requests for your password or bank details.

3. BE CONSIDERATE

Use the right communication tool for the job. If you need an immediate response, think you'll have a lot of follow-up questions, or need to convey a complex topic using visual aids, email is probably not the best tool. Always consider whether your question or information could be communicated over the phone or face to face.

Avoid information overload Intensive use of e-mail and unnecessarily wide ccing of messages can cause stress to colleagues who are trying to keep up with the number of e-mails received.

Be timely and reasonable. If you need someone's response by a deadline, ask them with plenty of time to spare. They have commitments and deadlines of their own.

Respect work life balance

As members of a global University that supports flexible working we may receive work emails at any time. However, we are *not* expected to check our emails or respond outside our normal working hours. If you wish to send work emails before 8am or after 6 pm, local time, consider including a standard message in your signature on the following lines:

At Heriot-Watt we work flexibly - so whilst it suits me to email now, I do not expect a response or action outside of your own working hours.

Imagine you are the recipient of the communications

Consider your language and tone to avoid causing possible hurt or offence to others, for example capital letters are often interpreted as shouting.

Never send an angry or contentious communication

Before you press send: sleep on it. Better still, have a conversation in person or on the phone to resolve the issue

If you can't respond, tell them that you'll get to it later.

If someone sends you an urgent email that you can't respond to for the time being send them a quick message to let them know, specifically, when you will get to it.

Be positive

Use every communication to move business forward, never to apportion blame, make a point at someone else's expense or cover your own back.

4. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Be concise

Communicate “action steps” first, not last.

By listing actions steps first and foremost, you keep the attention on the items you want to draw attention to.

Make the way forward clear

Be proactive- if you looking for feedback or advice make a clear and constructive proposal or set out options for consideration so that your recipient knows what action you are seeking from them

Include realistic deadlines Help individuals integrate the tasks into their schedule. Let recipients know if a response from them is imperative or optional.

Specify who should respond. If you send an email to a list or a group of people, specify who in that group is responsible for following up.

Stick to one message, one topic. If an email conversation moves onto a different topic, change the subject line

Use subject lines to indicate importance and time sensitivity or to link to case files. Use headers like “FOR APPROVAL:” to indicate what action is or is not needed. Where possible use a reference number e.g. *F007-19 Expenses claims* so you can track all correspondence relating to a specific case

Avoid using URGENT, IMPORTANT and high priority Try to avoid these types of words in an email or subject line. Only use this if it is a really, really urgent or important message.

Use cc: field sparingly. Try not to use the cc: field unless the recipient in the cc: field needs to receive a copy of the message and knows why.

Never “reply all” (unless you absolutely must)

Use “FYI” for communications that have no actionable information.

Provide a summary when you forward an "FYI" message

Save your recipient time and confusion by providing a quick summary of the entire thread.

Send links- not attachments where possible

Organise your messages by moving incoming and outgoing messages into subject-related folders.

Don't mix work and private communications

If you use a University account for any personal messages, create a "Personal" folder, and transfer all such messages (both received and sent) into this folder.