

**School of Natural and Built Environment
Queen's University Belfast**

GUIDELINES FOR E-MAIL PROTOCOL (2017-18)

Boundaries on Sending Internal E-mails

In order to respect the boundaries to our working lives, and taking into account the growing body of evidence suggesting that pressure to constantly respond to e-mail affects wellbeing and productivity, it is suggested that we should voluntarily limit use of internal e-mails between certain hours, as follows:

- Monday - Friday, 7pm - 7am
- Weekends - Not at all
- University closure days - Not at all

It is also suggested that we should aim to limit e-mails on Fridays to time-sensitive matters to afford staff the latitude for more focused work on research, writing or other significant projects.

Should an extremely time-sensitive or urgent matter arise during those times, staff are encouraged to telephone colleagues directly or send a text.

This policy does not imply that staff cannot compose emails as Outlook (desktop) allows you to delay delivery to a scheduled time (see 'Options', Delay delivery' in the compose message screen).

E-mail content and addressees

Staff are encouraged to think carefully about the content of e-mails and who should be copied into them.

In order to maximise efficiency and minimise annoyance please aim to:

- Keep it short. Use brevity and aim to limit your e-mail to 5 sentences, or bullet points. Number each issue requiring specific attention.
- Refrain from using the "Reply to All" feature to give your opinion to those who may not be interested. In most cases replying to the Sender alone is your best course of action. Always double-check that you have selected the correct recipient (s).
- Be sure the Subject field accurately reflects the content of your e-mail.
- Refrain from sending one-liners. "Thanks" and "OK" – these are not usually required.
- Always proof read the content – do not just rely on spell-checker.
- Do not send a string of e-mails when one well composed e-mail will do.
- Be polite. Think before you press send. Ask yourself is it better to talk face-to-face? And try not to send off an "I'm outraged!" as your reply.
- Take a deep breath. If an e-mail has annoyed you, stop and think whether an 'outraged' reply will really make the situation any better (although it might make you feel better).
- Is e-mail the best way: Consider whether the issue and required response could be managed more effectively by other means (see above) like talking face to face.
- Hidden horrors! Check the correspondence below the current e-mail especially if you are forwarding e-mails on. You may not want the new recipient to see what's gone on before.
- Do not copy management into an e-mail simply to apportion blame. Try to sort the problem out instead of casting aspersions.
- Remember that all e-mails can be retrieved as part of any FoI request, so don't send anything incriminating or include content that you may later regret.
- Signing off: Please set up a signature (footer) to be included at the end of every message. Keep this succinct and include links to your PURE profile, if appropriate.
- Data Protection: When sending messages to multiple recipients hide the e-mail addresses by using the BCC address box especially if you have not been given permission to publish individuals' personal contact details.
- Sensitive Information: If the e-mail contains sensitive information it should be clearly indicated, in the title, or at the beginning of the message that the e-mail is not intended for general distribution.
- Personal e-mails: Please be advised that the University may need to access your computer, including e-mails that you have sent or received. As a result you should identify personal emails as such by putting 'personal' or 'non-work' in the title to distinguish them. You should store such e-mails in a folder marked 'personal' and delete them as soon as possible.