



Email Etiquette at LSE

1. Introduction

- 1.1.1 The School operates in a fast paced and, at times, highly pressured environment, in which email is accepted as one of the primary methods of communication used on a daily basis. Email may even be the best way to communicate a particular message, but in an age of digital information 'overload', all staff should be mindful of the impact of an excessively email driven culture and make smart choices about what, when and how to communicate with others.
- 1.1.2 With many individuals now accessing emails across multiple personal and work devices, it is increasingly important to use email appropriately in a way that fosters productivity and efficiency whilst enabling staff to manage a reasonable work life balance.
- 1.1.3 It is also important that staff are aware of how best to use emails to enhance instead of hinder working practices and relationships with others, to be sure our communication choices are improving the quality of the working environment at the LSE.

2. Guidance aims

- 2.1.1 This guidance covers all staff at the School and sets out what is considered acceptable behaviour in relation to the use of emails between staff and others. This includes internal correspondents, i.e. colleagues, team members, students or volunteers, and those external to the School, such as contractors or providers. Expectations set out within this guidance

complement the School's Ethics Code, which applies to all aspects of work undertaken by staff.

- 2.1.2 This guidance focuses on email behaviour and etiquette and does not attempt to outline the technical requirements of email usage. Details on the School's legislative obligations on how emails are handled in relation to being viewed as 'data' or 'information' can be found in the Information Management Technology (IMT) Division's *'electronic messaging guidance'*.

3. Guidance principles

- 3.1.1 Email communication is highly beneficial for speed, minimal cost and convenience. They are a formal written form of communication which is covered by a number of laws in the UK, meaning they can be used for legal purposes (e.g. an employment tribunal or court of law as evidence where it is deemed necessary).
- 3.1.2 Although it is often regarded as such, email should *not* be considered an informal method of speaking with others when dealing with School business, despite it being a fast and easy way of communicating. It is also important that it is recognised by all staff that intensive or overuse of email can result in negatively impacting recipients in a number of ways.
- 3.1.3 Excessive or inappropriate use of email, or emails with an excessive amount unnecessary content, can result in 'information overload', where an individual feels overwhelmed by the volume of emails received. This can lead to a number of negative outcomes such as stress, anxiety, miscommunication, indecision or poor decision making, procrastination and other counter-productive avoidance behaviours, though this is not an exhaustive list.

4. Fostering good working relationships

- 4.1.1 When sending emails, senders should be aware of their audience at all times. In doing so it is important to keep any relevant dynamics in mind, i.e. with senior staff emailing more junior colleagues, what may seem to the sender as a request or suggestion may be interpreted as a directive by the recipient(s).
- 4.1.2 Equally, what one may consider a reasonable tone may easily cause offence to another. Staff should ensure that care and attention is taken with email correspondence, just as it would be with a written letter, to reduce the chance of misinterpretation and misunderstanding.
- 4.1.3 The 'bcc' option should generally not be used in the interest of disclosure and full transparency of communications to all parties, both the sender and recipient.

5. Emails out of hours

- 5.1.1 One way of fostering good working relationships at work is being conscious of email use out of hours. The normal School working day is 9.30am to 5.30pm and, for the purposes of this guidance, "out of hours" emails are those sent before 9.00am and after 6.00pm.
- 5.1.2 Owing to the nature of some roles at the School, and the range of locations these may be undertaken, emails sent outside of working hours will sometimes be both normal and

necessary. For many other roles across the School, out of hours emails should be the exception rather than the rule.

- 5.1.3 Emails sent outside of working hours can alleviate the sender's workload, particularly as teaching loads and/or other intensive periods of meetings and commitments are predominantly set within working hours, or can be convenient where travel is required. With technology allowing staff to access emails via mobiles, tablet and laptops while on the move, the boundary between professional and personal arenas can also become increasingly blurred.
- 5.1.4 Whilst it is the prerogative of the sender to send an email whenever they choose, it is also the recipient's prerogative to choose when to read their incoming emails (i.e. normally within working hours), provided this is in line with the accepted levels of professional behaviour and aligned with the expectations of their role responsibilities. There should be no general expectation that staff will read emails out of hours. It is also advised where an urgent response is needed, a follow up by telephone may be more appropriate than a "chaser" email.
- 5.1.5 Senders should also be mindful of the impact on others when sending lots of emails out of hours, even if the sender does not expect a swift response. Arriving to work to a full "inbox" unexpectedly can be a stressor to recipients who may be deluged by emails both inside and outside of working hours.
- 5.1.6 It is also important to remember that some departments within the School will have pre-agreed Service Level Agreements (SLAs) regarding response times to emails. It is expected that all SLAs should be reasonable, reviewed regularly by management within its own area, communicated clearly to all of its users and be respectfully accepted and adhered to by others.

6. Tackling problems

- 6.1.1 Where staff feel that colleagues are not making efforts to abide by the contents of this guidance it is reasonable to:
 - Speak with the person who sent the email - ideally in person or by phone - reminding them about the principles within this guidance and encouraging them to follow its advice. All staff should aim to support and remind each other of the importance of respecting boundaries and working in a professional and efficient manner. However, entering into email discussion about appropriateness of emails is rarely to be encouraged.
 - Speak to your line manager or HR Partner in the first instances for a second opinion on email content and further advice if necessary, if you feel it to be inappropriate.
 - Try applying a degree of professional empathy to the message sent and consider whether you could be 'reading too much into it'. Feedback to the sender may still be necessary, but taking a step back and considering whether the issue is typical in your experience of an individual may separate a 'one-off' from a more serious issue.

7. 'Rule of Thumb' email guidance

In terms of what is currently considered good practice:

- Consider whether an email is the most effective method of communicating your message. It may be more productive to have a quick meeting or phone call followed up with one summary email to confirm discussions (if necessary).
- Remain respectful, treating others with dignity at all times.
- Write all email messages in a professional manner. Whilst the written style may sometimes differ, the general content of a work email should be consistent to other forms of written communication.
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- Keep emails short and to the point wherever possible. This will be beneficial for all dealing with large numbers of emails and assist with recipients working remotely on tablets or mobiles.
- Re-read emails before sending from the perspective of the recipient(s). Ensure your communication is clear, in particular in relation to the positioning of instructions within the body of the message, highlighting clearly required actions. Where 'no action' is necessary and where the email is for only for information, this should be stated.
- Do not leave the subject line blank.
- Ensure appropriate use of cc. and whether all participants of an email need to continue to be cc.ed or included in an email trail when the topic deviates to another issue.
- Be extremely cautious in the use of bcc. ensuring that decisions to do so would meet the standards of the Ethics Code, particularly with regard to integrity and transparency.
- Try to minimise the use of graphics, different fonts, and formats stored within a document when sending it as an attachment to an email.
- Be extremely careful when sending emails containing personal or confidential information.
- Check the recipient's name, especially if there is more than one person with the same name or where a person uses more than one email address e.g. LSE work email and a personal email.
- Before commencing writing an email on a sensitive topic, consider talking confidentially in person or by phone instead. If there is a possibility that the email will be misconstrued, misunderstood or intercepted, it is probably best avoided.
- Do not expect others to wade through extensively long email trails to pick up important information you wish them to be aware of.
- Where the content of an extended email trail has changed direction or purpose be mindful of continuing to forward excessively long email trails to others or continuing to include others as either 'to' or 'cc' recipients unnecessarily.
- Avoid using uppercase text unless completely appropriate and necessary for particular emphasis (e.g. acronyms or initials of names), as this is often interpreted as electronic "shouting".
- Be careful when using humour or sarcasm within an email as this can be easily misinterpreted.
- It is accepted that emails are may be prepared and sent outside of normal School working hours, however, it should be fully expected that replies should not be expected before the next working day commences.
- Automated 'out of office' notifications can be used to manage expectations for both the recipient and sender of emails (e.g. by explaining the time of return to work following a period of time off work, period of back-to-back meetings, exam times etc.). Where possible it is helpful to ensure an appropriate signposted alternative is suggested.

- Use Outlook to set up meeting, which in turn involves making staff diaries accessible to others
- Set clear instructions at the start emails to enhance productivity and efficient use of time for the recipients, e.g. 'this is just an FYI for person X', '@action or sign-off required', 'please reply so that we can all build on each other's comments, and I will collate responses', etc.
- Once documents are finalised and unchanging (e.g. committee papers), do not use multiple attachments where possible. If such are necessary, it may be helpful to house all documents in a prescribed order, using a pdf format

8. Personal email usage

- 8.1.1 Email functionality is provided to staff for work purposes; however, it is recognised that in a more flexible work-life environment, limited usage of work email for personal usage is unlikely to cause a significant adverse impact on work productivity. Nonetheless, staff should ensure that personal emails do not impinge upon work performance and do not take precedence over work that requires urgent attention. Where possible, personal emails should be limited to lunch breaks, tea breaks etc.
- 8.1.2 Staff should also be aware that emails containing inappropriate material are not acceptable at any time. Staff should also be made aware that, 'deleting or 'permanently deleting' emails does not mean they are unrecoverable at a later date. Further detail relating to privacy of personal emails can be found in the *electronic messaging guidance* issued by IMT.

Review schedule

Review interval	Next review due by	Next review start
1 Year	March 2019	Feb 2019

Version history

Version	Date	Approved by	Notes
1	Feb 2017	Chief Operating Officer	

Links

Reference	Link
123	abc
123	abc

Contacts

Position	Name	Email	Notes
abc	abc	abc@lse.ac.uk	abc

Communications and Training

Will this document be publicised through Internal Communications?	Yes/ No
Will training needs arise from this policy	Yes/ No
If Yes, please give details	