Email Management Guidance

1. Introduction

1.1 Email is a key business communication tool which creates important information of how the University operates and the decisions we make. This is not a substitute for other forms of communication, for example, face to face meetings, and should be treated as supporting other means of communication.

1.2 Emails can be important business records and it is important that they are managed in the same way as any other formal records. This guidance outlines good practice in how to manage emails in order to work more effectively and comply with legislation.

1.3 Before using email to share information and send data we should consider whether email is the best way to communicate. It may be that the information being sent via email can be shared with colleagues using shared drives, servers or business information systems rather than sending emails with attachments**.**

1.4 All work emails are University records. We should be clear and professional in our emails as almost all work emails could be released in response to an information request. Emails are also legally enforceable and disclosable. Always consider the content and tone of emails before they are sent. Further information on email etiquette can be found in this guidance.

1.5 It is important that staff regularly read and respond to emails.

2. Managing emails

2.1 Emails should be managed in the same way that we manage other business information.

2.2 As email is used for a variety of purposes we need to be able to identify emails which are important and need to be managed. Things to consider are:

- The evidence which the email contains. For example, does the email demonstrate that the university has followed procedures?
- Will the email be required or be referred to in the future to prove that something has taken place or been agreed?
- Will the information be needed to explain why a particular decision was reached?
- Will the email help the university defend this decision if it is challenged?
- Will the email assist with similar situation in the future?
- Do we need it to carry out university business including administrative tasks
- Will the email be relevant to research?
- Do we need the information for financial purposes?
- Is there a legal requirement to keep the information?
- Does the information have any historical value?

2.3 It is good practice to:

- Structure both In and Sent boxes in a folder structure which reflects your Common Drive
- Create rules to automatically move emails to folders to improve business operation, evidence of decisions and what took place
- Use categories to indicate topic/types of emails.
- Use flags to manage important emails

- Save important emails in a way that is accessible to appropriate staff. Usually this will be a Common Drive or business information system. This ensures that important information can be found and is not lost.
- In some circumstances email should be managed in hard copy, that is, printed and included in a manual file. For example, operational procedures may require a printed copy of an email to be included in a case file.
- Consider using shared email accounts based on business function this enables a team of staff to share emails received and sent.
- Flag or colour code emails which have short term value and are needed for reference for a short period of time only. Examples include duplicate copies of minutes and notices of meetings. These should be retained in a folder within your in-box and can be deleted when the issue or project is completed.
- Emails which are not business related and ephemeral emails should be deleted when they are no longer needed.
- Deleted items, junk email and sent items should be managed and purged on a regular basis in the same manner as received email.
- Your deleted emails should be deleted regularly.

3. Saving email

Emails which have lasting value for information, evidence or accountability purposes need to be retained and managed as records. These important emails should be saved, or 'captured', in a business information system, Common Drive or student e-file system. It is good practice to:

- Save the email and any attachments as one record.
- Ensure that emails are saved in a way which ensures that confidential or highly confidential information can only be accessed by appropriate staff by using Shared or Common Drives or shared mailboxes with appropriate access permissions.
- Retain emails according to the subject, in line with the retention period outlined in the Records Retention Schedule.
- Most emails form part of an email string and it is not necessary to save or capture each new communication. It is good practice to save an email trail.
- Save emails at a significant point such as a decision being reached or the end of the conversation, even though this may not be clear.
- The sender or recipient of the email should save it; if you are copied in to an email you do not need to save it.
- Agree operational procedures so that there is a shared understanding within a team of who should retain the email records about a particular issue or project.

4. Disposal of emails

It is important not to keep emails too long as retaining email unnecessarily:

- Makes it more difficult to find the ones you need
- May breach legislation, in particular, the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA)
- Retained emails have to be retrieved and disclosed under legislation such as the DPA and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002
- Personal email boxes should not be use as a place to store information in the long term as they are inaccessible to other staff.

5. Information Security

Email can be insecure; it's easy to make mistakes and duplicates information. In order to ensure that information is appropriately shared:

- Check that the recipients are correct. This includes checking multiple recipients.
- Use mail groups and keep these up to date.
- Take particular care when handling personal data and business sensitive information to prevent emails inadvertently exposing personal information or business sensitive information.
- Check attachments to ensure that the correct version of a document is attached. Ensure that the recipient can receive the information.
- Only forward emails when you know that you have the authority to share the information. Consider whether the recipient that you are forwarding the email to needs to have the information and remember that personal data should be shared on a need to know basis.
- Before forwarding an e-mail thread to a new recipient, check to ensure that they have the permissions to see the content. If possible remove any unnecessary content or information that they should not see.
- When sending confidential or highly confidential information the guidance in the Information Classification Policy should be followed and emails protectively marked. A separate guide on this can be found on the website at http://www.gcu.ac.uk/staff/it/itregulationspolicies/
- Emails can pose a threat to cyber security and staff should work securely by not opening attachments from unknown sources, not sharing passwords and not disclosing personal information unnecessarily.
- You should also be aware of unexpected or unusual emails or attachments from known contacts as these can used for malicious purposes and scams.

6. Effective email use

6.1 Subject lines should clearly label the topic of the email to help recipients use email more effectively. This enables recipients to more easily and quickly respond, locate or delete messages. Where possible include a status category, for example, Information Only, Action, Time sensitive, Low Priority.

6.2 To make effective use of staff time before sending an email, take time to ensure that the message is clear, that requested actions and deadlines are highlighted, and that the message is sent only to the necessary recipients. Where urgent action is required this should be highlighted.

6.3 Emails should relate to a single topic and use crisp, jargon-free sentences and should avoid using unusual fonts and colours.

6.4 It is good practice to avoid multi-paragraph emails or having long email trails. If an email trail is too long it is better to have a discussion either face to face by telephone or video conference.

6.5 Anyone who needs to act on an e-mail should be included in the To section or distribution list.

6.6 CC should be used to include individuals who only need the content of the e-mail for information but do not need to take any action. Reduce the need for others to read emails they don't need to, by using specific distribution lists and not defaulting to 'reply all' unless appropriate.

7. Email Etiquette

7.1 Care should be taken to ensure that emails are written in an appropriate tone. It is easy for the tone of emails to be misinterpreted.

7.2 Avoid sending emails which could have a negative tone by delaying and reviewing to avoid causing offence. You should take cognisance of University policy including the Dignity at Work and Study Policy and GCU Values.

7.3 Use plain language and avoid jargon. Work related emails should not be written in chat acronyms and text speak. Displaying over familiarity by using emoticons and 'x' is not appropriate.

7.4 It is not necessary to reply to every email; especially those that are themselves clear responses. An e-mail saying "Thanks for your note. I'll do that" is not actually needed and does not need a response.

7.5 Where a message can be expressed in half a dozen words, this can be done in the subject line. For example: Please call James Smith urgently.

7.6 Use a sans serif font that is easy to read and font size 12 as a minimum. Emails should be justified to the left.

7.7 Do not write using all capital letters. This is generally harder to read than lower case letters. This applies to the title, headings and the body text. Using capital letters in an email is tantamount to shouting and should be avoided.

7.8 Do not use bold, italics or underlining to set the tone or add emphasis to your email. Choose words or phrases such as 'please note' instead.

7.9 To help the recipient understand your email use good punctuation: a full stop at the end of paragraphs and a full stop or a colon at the end of list items.

7.10 An appropriate Out of Office message should be used which directs people to information or someone who can assist them when we are unavailable for a length of time. (An example is provided in this guidance).

7.11 University guidance on email footers/signatures should be followed to ensure that emails which we send contain our contact details. (Guidance on this is available at http://www.gcu.ac.uk/marketingandcommunications/brandguidelinesandresources/emailsignature/)

7.12 Blind Carbon Copy (Bcc) should be used only in limited circumstances. Bcc can be viewed as sneaky or underhand. An example of appropriate use of Bcc would be where there are multiple recipients and they do not know each other's email address. In this case Bcc is used to protect the names of recipients.

7.13 The Outlook Calendar should be used so that staff availability is visible in order to arrange meetings efficiently. It is good practice to do this rather than arranging meetings via email.

7.14 We should respect each other's time. The onus is on us all to minimize the time others need to spend processing our e-mail. Before sending, we will take time to ensure that the message is clear, that requested actions and deadlines are highlighted, and that the message is sent only to the necessary recipients.

We should not expect others to respond to emails sent outside working hours, nor to reply immediately whilst at work.

8. Out of Office

It is good practice to use an Out of Office message which provides information including the time that you are out of the office. Where possible this should the details of a member of staff who is available to assist in your absence.

A standard message should be used containing the following information:

> Thank you for your message. I am currently out of the office with [limited] [no] access to email.
>
> I will be returning on [day] [date] and will respond to you after I return.
>
> If you need assistance before then you can contact me at [telephone number]
>
> [or]
>
> For urgent enquiries please contact [name] at [email address] or [external telephone number].
>
> Regards
> [name]

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