

## **Appendix 1: Good practice for managing email**

### **Eight Things You Need to Know About E-mail**

#### **1. E-mail has replaced telephone calls and memos**

Many people have replaced telephone conversations and memos with e-mail discussions. However, the language in which e-mail is written is often less formal and more open to misinterpretation than a written memo or a formal letter. Remember that e-mail should be laid out and formulated to your school's standards for written communications.

#### **2. E-mail is not always a secure medium to send confidential information**

You need to think about information security when you send confidential information by e-mail. The consequences of an e-mail containing sensitive information being sent to an unauthorised person could be a civil penalty of up to £500,000 from the Information Commissioner or it could end up on the front page of a newspaper. Confidential or sensitive information should only be sent by a secure encrypted e-mail system. Never put personal information (such as a pupil's name) in the subject line of an e-mail.

#### **3. E-mail is disclosable under the access to information regimes**

All school e-mail is disclosable under Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation. Be aware that anything you write in an email could potentially be made public.

#### **4. E-mail is not necessarily deleted immediately**

E-mails can remain in a system for a period of time after you have deleted them. You must remember that although you may have deleted your copy of the e-mail, the recipients may not and therefore there will still be copies in existence. These copies could be disclosable under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or under the Data Protection Act 1998.

#### **5. E-mail can form a contractual obligation**

Agreements entered into by e-mail can form a contract. You need to be aware of this if you enter into an agreement with anyone, especially external contractors. Individual members of staff should not enter into agreements either with other members of staff internally or with external contractors unless they are authorised to do so.

#### **6. E-mail systems are commonly used to store information which should be stored somewhere else**

All attachments in e-mail should be saved into any appropriate electronic filing system or printed out and placed on paper files.

#### **7. Employers must be careful how they monitor e-mail**

Any employer has a right to monitor the use of e-mail provided it has informed members of staff that it may do so. Monitoring the content of e-mail messages is a more sensitive matter and if you intend to do this you will need to be able to prove that you have the consent of staff. If you intend to monitor staff e-mail or telephone calls you should inform them how you

intend to do this and who will carry out the monitoring. The Information Commissioner's Employment Practices Code is an excellent guide to this subject.

## **8. E-mail is one of the most common causes of stress in the work-place**

Whilst e-mail can be used to bully or harass people, it is more often the sheer volume of e-mail which causes individuals to feel that they have lost control of their e-mail and their workload. Regular filing and deletion can prevent this happening.

### Creating and sending e-mail

Here are some steps to consider when sending e-mail.

#### **Do I need to send this e-mail?**

Ask yourself whether this transaction needs to be done by e-mail? It may be that it is more appropriate to use the telephone or to check with someone face to face.

#### **To whom do I need to send this e-mail?**

Limit recipients to the people who really need to receive the e-mail. Avoid the use of global or group address lists unless it is absolutely necessary. Never send on chain e-mails. When sending emails containing personal or sensitive data always respond to an authorised, approved address. All emails that are used for official business must be sent from an official business domain address.

#### **Use a consistent method of defining a subject line**

Having a clearly defined subject line helps the recipient to sort the e-mail on receipt. A clear subject line also assists in filing all e-mails relating to individual projects in one place. For example, the subject line might be the name of the policy, or the file reference number.

#### **Ensure that the e-mail is clearly written**

- Do not use text language or informal language in school e-mails.
- Always sign off with a name (and contact details).

Make sure that you use plain English and ensure that you have made it clear how you need the recipient to respond.

- Never write a whole e-mail in capital letters. This can be interpreted as shouting.
- Always spell check an e-mail before you send it. Do not use the urgent flag unless it is absolutely necessary, recipients will not respond to the urgent flag if they perceive that you use it routinely.
- If possible, try to stick to one subject for the content of each e-mail, as it will be easier to categorise it later if you need to keep the e-mail.

#### **Sending attachments**

Sending large attachments (e.g. graphics or presentations) to a sizeable circulation list can cause resource problems on your network. Where possible put the attachment in an

appropriate area on a shared drive and send the link round to the members of staff who need to access it.

## **Disclaimers**

Adding a disclaimer to an e-mail mitigates risk, such as sending information to the wrong recipient, or helps to clarify the school's position in relation to the information being e-mailed. Typically, they cover the fact that information may be confidential, the intention of being solely used by the intended recipient, and any views or opinions of the sender are not necessarily those of the school. There is some debate about how enforceable disclaimers are. Legal advice should be sought when using or drafting a disclaimer for your organisation to ensure it meets your specific needs.

## Managing received e-mails

This section contains some hints and tips about how to manage incoming e-mails.

**a) Manage interruptions Incoming e-mail can be an irritating distraction. The following tips can help manage the interruptions.**

- Turn off any alert that informs you e-mail has been received
- Plan times to check e-mail into the day (using an out of office message to tell senders when you will be looking at your e-mail can assist with this).

## **b) Use rules and alerts**

By using rules and alerts members of staff can manage their inbox into theme-based folders. For example:

- E-mails relating to a specific subject or project can be diverted to a named project folder
- E-mails from individuals can be diverted to a specific folder
- Warn senders that you will assume that if you are copied in to an e-mail, the message is for information only and requires no response from you.
- Internally, use a list of defined words to indicate in the subject line what is expected of recipients (for example: "For Action:", "FYI:", etc)
- Use electronic calendars to invite people to meetings rather than sending e-mails asking them to attend

**c) Using an out of office message If you check your e-mail at stated periods during the day you can use an automated response to incoming e-mail which tells the recipient when they might expect a reply. A sample message might read as follows:**

Thank you for your e-mail. I will be checking my e-mail at three times today, 8:30am, 1:30pm and 3:30pm. If you require an immediate response to your e-mail please telephone me on xxxxxxxxx. This gives the sender the option to contact you by phone if they need an immediate response.

## Filing e-mail

### **Attachments only**

Where the main purpose of the e-mail is to transfer documents, then the documents should be saved into the appropriate place in an electronic filing system or printed out and added to a paper file. The e-mail can then be deleted.

### **E-mail text and attachments**

Where the text of the e-mail adds to the context or value of the attached documents it may be necessary to keep the whole e-mail. The best way to do this and retain information which makes up the audit trail, is to save the e-mail in .msg format. This can be done either by clicking and dragging the e-mail into the appropriate folder in an application such as MS Outlook, or by using the “save as” function to save the e-mail in an electronic filing system. If the e-mail needs to be re-sent it will automatically open into MS Outlook. Where appropriate the e-mail and the attachments can be printed out to be stored on a paper file, however, a printout does not capture all the audit information which storing the e-mail in .msg format will.

### **E-mail text only**

If the text in the body of the e-mail requires filing, the same method can be used as that outlined above. This will retain information for audit trail purposes. Alternatively the e-mail can be saved in .html or .txt format. This will save all the text in the e-mail and a limited amount of the audit information. The e-mail can not be re-sent if it is saved in this format. The technical details about how to undertake all of these functions are available in application Help functions.

### **How long to keep e-mails?**

E-mail is primarily a communications tool, and e-mail applications are not designed for keeping e-mail as a record in a storage area meeting records management storage standards. E-mail that needs to be kept should be identified by content; for example, does it form part of a pupil record? Is it part of a contract? These e-mails may need to be saved into any appropriate electronic filing system or printed out and placed on paper files.