The University of Leicester

Internal Communications Guidelines

For more information on the guidelines, or if you have any queries around communications, please contact:

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www.le.ac.uk/marketing
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Good internal communications are everyone’s responsibility. An internal communications function has now been established at the university. As a result of research into internal staff and student communications at Leicester, the need for a set of internal guidelines has become clear.

What are the objectives of good internal communications?

- **Enhances the student experience** by bringing together staff from across departmental and college boundaries to improve the university’s services.
- **Improves communication** across the University by enhancing and creating a clear and effective set of staff internal communication channels.
- **Influences the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of staff** by putting the University of Leicester’s strategic plan at the heart of all communications.
- **Encourages pride and loyalty** by celebrating staff achievements, and showcasing the very best the university has to offer.
- **Drives forward change.** Well-informed staff know where they are, where they are going and how they are expected to get there.
- **Builds community.** Teams are more likely to work together in a supportive way, because they will understand what the aims and ambitions of the university and therefore their own team are.
- **Retains talent.** A happy workforce is more likely to stay where it is – giving security to the team as a whole.

We do recognise that communication is a two-way process. If we want our views to be heard we need to be ready to listen. So, in everything we do we should provide an opportunity for people to respond.

In particular, if we want someone to take an action we have to make space for them to ask questions, to check their own understanding and to ensure they know what they need to do.

If the action is complex, difficult or potentially represents major change, we should be ready to listen to alternative suggestions about how a job is done and able to demonstrate that we’ve heard. Whether you are using email, Yammer or team meetings you will always get a better reaction when you seek a conversation rather than talking at people.

This document sets out some best practice guidelines, some tips and insight into making the most of communication at the University including the use of our suite of communication tools (email, social media, website etc), and advice on planning ongoing campaigns.
2. Tone of voice

Our personality should shine though when we write anything for the University.

As communications come from people throughout the University, a lack of consistency has been identified as a real issue, along with feedback from students that some communications can be somewhat abrupt and unfriendly.

Whether someone is working in corporate services or an academic department, there should be an identifiable ‘university voice’ and consistency of style while not losing the personality of the person writing.

Consistency instills confidence in the reader, makes it clear that we are a university that cares and takes care in its communications. If we can achieve this, then people internally, whether staff or students, will trust us.

This statement from our Strategic Plan is a written declaration of our core purpose and focus:

“We aim above all for excellence. Already one of the very best British and global universities, we enjoy an enviable record of research discoveries, a flair for teaching innovation and proven success in broadening access to higher education. We are long-established yet focused on a future that will see us pioneering a distinctive elite of research-intensive institutions, open to all who have talent.”

This should be at the heart of everything we write and a starting point for thinking about any communication.

A large amount of research has taken place asking staff and students about the ways in which they would like to be communicated with.
What is the ‘Leicester voice’?

Our personality should shine though when we write anything for the University. It is:

**APPROACHABLE**

**PASSIONATE**

**INSPIRATIONAL**

**KNOWLEDGEABLE**

Above all, we communicate with **CONFIDENCE**. With our deep knowledge base and research focus, we are a credible voice of excellence.

Some tips when writing any communication.

- Identify who you’re talking to and imagine them in the room with you. What would you say?
- The University or your Department/area of work is a first person plural entity, so use ‘we’, ‘us’, ‘our’ and always address the reader as ‘you’.
- Use clear, short headings and subheadings to summarise each part of your text. Don’t phrase headings as questions.
- Trim away all excess fat. There is no benefit in using four words where one will do.
- On the other hand, avoid jargon: don’t be afraid to use four clear words in place of one that only half your audience will understand.
- Use the active voice (‘We are holding a conference.’), not the passive voice (‘A conference is being held.’)
- Read your text out loud. You should be able to read each sentence in a single breath.
- When you have finished, leave your text for a day or so, then look at it again. You’re more likely to spot ways to improve it.
4. Email guidance

We all rely on email, it is intrinsic to the modern workplace, but it’s also something that we have a tendency to misuse.

It’s easy to quickly fire off an email and think that your job is done, but in order to ensure effective use, we’ve put together some guidance on best practice.

• Ensure that communications and requests are sent directly to the person they are intended for.

• Keep emails short and to the point, ensuring that the message is clear.

• Make sure that the subject is clear and concise so it’s easy to find again in inboxes and try not to change the subject on long email chains.

• Aim to answer your students’ and colleagues’ emails within three or four days, if possible. Equally, aim to make any enquiries three or four days before you need an answer, if possible.

• For student emails, ensure the subject line is informative and concise. A title of ‘9am lecture cancelled’ is far more likely to be read than ‘Lecture rescheduling information’.

• If any action is required, highlight this in the text, stating by whom and when.

• Don’t copy anyone in ‘just in case’. Anyone copied in to an email should be getting something from it. Always be clear why you are copying them in even if it is simply ‘for information’, and if action is required from them, include them in the ‘To’ address field.

• Avoid using ‘reply all’ when just replying to one person is sufficient.

• Ensure your full contact details including name, job title, direct line and office location are provided in any emails that you send. We have a standard email sign-off which all staff should include in their signature.

• Use out of office messages and ensure they include the dates or times you are unavailable for, and an alternative contact for urgent queries.

• Consider whether email is the best medium for your communication – could you get more out of a face-to-face conversation, Skype or telephone call, or could you use Yammer?
Departmental emails

- Specific local information should be managed and distributed by the division/department sending the message. Internal Communications can advise on the content or mode of delivery.

- When sending an email from the department to groups of students and staff, it’s best to do this from a shared departmental email address. This ensures it is seen as ‘official’ and allows more than one person to monitor a mailbox for responses. When sending from central accounts do include the name and role of the person sending as a sign-off. Staff wanting action from the email should send queries and requests to the same address to avoid clogging up personal email inboxes.

- Make sure you’re not sending too many emails to students. We know they are overloaded, and while they appreciate being kept in the loop, do check with colleagues what else is being sent to them.

All-user emails

- All-user emails are tightly regulated and are only sent for issues of institutional importance. The Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, IT Services and Internal Communications are the only areas with permission to send all-staff or all-student emails. If you are sending to a wider group than your department, please check with Internal Communications that it won’t clash with wider mail-outs, so that we can ensure your message is as successful as possible. See Appendix B for guidance on all-user email.

Ask Us anything

- If you have any queries about any aspect of the University or want to make a confidential enquiry, rather than emailing a member of the senior team, who may not be able to reply quickly, email askus@le.ac.uk and we’ll get back to you within five working days or get your comments to the right person.
5. Outlook calendars

In order to help staff work together, the following suggestions for best use of outlook calendars have been proposed.

**Keep your Outlook calendar up-to-date**

Enter appointments and holidays with the correct availability setting so others can check and see your availability for meetings and collaborative work.

**Calendars are set to show everyone your Free/Busy information**

You can share your calendar with others to display your appointments. If you do change the privacy setting to ‘None’ this will automatically be reverted to Free/Busy.

**Within a team it’s advisable to share your calendar**

This is so your team can see where you are if they need to take a message. It might also be appropriate for a manager to enable a PA or secretary to make and accept calendar appointments on their behalf.

**Part-time staff should create recurring appointments to show when they are not normally working**

If you normally finish work at 3pm on a Tuesday, set up a recurring appointment 3–5pm every Tuesday and set the availability to **Out of Office** with the subject ‘Non-working time’.

**Travel time between meetings**

Adding on any travel time to the start and end of your meeting will help other meeting organisers who may not see the location details to plan accordingly.

**Blocking out time**

Many people block out time to focus on a particular piece of work. This can be marked as ‘Tentative’. Meeting organisers will try to avoid arranging meetings during this time but may use it if there are no other options.

**Arranging meetings**

All meetings should be arranged using Outlook Meeting Requests. When organising a meeting, check availability by viewing colleagues’ calendars or by using the Outlook Scheduling Assistant within a Meeting Request.

**Responding to meeting requests**

When you receive a meeting request, you should accept, reject or suggest a more suitable time as soon as possible in order to help the person arranging the meeting.

**For more in depth advice please visit the IT services Outlook Calendar pages**

http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/itservices/ithelp/my-computer/programs/office/outlook/calendar/
6. Face-to-face engagement

We may not think too much about our face-to-face communications, but they are one of the most vital and engaging ways we have of getting across information.

And when it comes to some of our technical and manual staff, it is often the only way in which they get their information, so it's important not to overlook this.

Managers, personal tutors and and members of staff with responsibility for communications have a direct line to staff and students, and often peer engagement is trusted far more than the more ‘official’ methods of communication. That is why it's important that when it comes to distributing information, we’re all well-informed about what's going on.

Equally, if a student receives information from their department which contradicts something they've received in an official capacity this has the potential to harm the reputation of the University and have an impact on the student experience and in consequence, our league table results.

It's not always possible to get things perfectly right, but by keeping aware of the latest University news and information via the staff web pages, and working with the Internal Communications team, we can help to improve the quality of communication across the University.

7. Printed materials and presentations

To ensure consistency within the University we have provided a number of different templates for presentations, memos and other uses.

8. Newsletters

We know that many departments have their own newsletters. We would encourage the use of online or email newsletters to give a local view of what's happening across the University (and to reduce the amount of individual emails sent). Please contact the design team for guidance on layout. We would also request that the person co-ordinating the newsletter becomes a Communications Champion and stays in touch with the Internal Communications Team so that any messages are consistent with those being sent University-wide.
9. Social media

The University has a set of guidelines for staff best practice on social media and we have a social media officer who plans and posts to the main University accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn etc).

If you identify yourself as university of member of staff online, it should be clear that the views expressed are not necessarily those of the institution.

If you want to include our University social media in your communications or set up a new social media account for your area, please talk to Social Media Officer Victoria Russell to see whether your request can be accommodated.

10. Yammer

Yammer, which was introduced in January 2016 allows staff to liaise and collaborate online. Think of it as an online meeting room and social area to work with colleagues across the University. It’s linked to your University IT account and limited to anyone with an @leicester.ac.uk email account (this does include students so be aware when posting in non-private areas).

Full guidelines are available within Yammer, but the platform is dedicated to openly sharing and discussing work-related information. As many people may not be familiar with Yammer it is worth setting out some tips on how best to use it.

Projects

Yammer is perfect as an informal project workspace. Just create a group and add the people you want to be involved. You can give and receive project updates, store useful project artefacts, store details about the project and chat online about strands of activity.

Ask questions

The whole point of an employee social network is the sharing of knowledge and information. So rather than racking your brains to find a contact who may be able to help you with something, just post to a group that’s related to your query and let our staff and their wealth of knowledge do the work.

Give out useful information

We are committed to open scholarship in our new Strategic Plan and this cuts across the entire institution. So if you have some findings that you feel other colleagues may benefit from, or have some notes from a conference or training session that would be helpful then share them.

An alternative to email

Don’t get caught up in long email threads, and keep your inbox clear of group discussions. If you need to discuss something with more than two people, then why not search for a relevant group (or set one up) and have a proper online conversation?

Thank people for a job well done

Yammer has a ‘praise’ function, which allows you to publicly thank people you’ve worked with. We are committed to celebrating and rewarding excellence at an institutional level, but equally, small gestures like this can help to enhance motivation, increase people’s satisfaction with their job and create a happier work environment.
If you’re creating an internal campaign, you may want to discuss with us to get some advice, find out whether any other campaigns are running at the same time, and avoid clashes with key university dates or external events.

**Objectives**

You should always be clear what you would like to happen as a result of your communication. Do you want people to DO something specific? Do you need them to be excited or supportive; is there something you would like them to FEEL? Or do you simply want people to KNOW some information?

Of course people don’t change their behaviour just because they read a well written email and an announcement on the intranet is unlikely to turn sceptics into active advocates. Being mindful of the outcome you want will shape how you deliver the message and the level of interaction or conversation you will need to plan.

**Audience**

You’ll want to think about your audience and the best way of reaching them. You’ll then want to identify the key moments within your campaign when you want people to engage with you. Putting these together will help you to plan your campaign.

**Timing**

Depending on your audience, you may want to give them more or less notice. Staff book things in weeks in advance to fit around their working hours and family life, so if you’re telling them about an event at the last minute, they’re unlikely to be able to attend. Students on the other hand don’t tend to plan so far in advance, so an announcement more than two weeks ahead of an event is unlikely to get much of a response. A drip-feed approach works better for this.

**Choosing the right method**

We can advise on the best way of communicating your message, whether it’s the staff or student webpages, all-user email, targeted email, social media, Yammer, Insider, signage and posters or printed leaflet.

We are currently working on updating a number of our internal communications methods as a result of the research we recently completed. As these changes start to come into effect we will update you with guidance as to their use.

Most communications will use a mixture of these methods, but please bear in mind that all-user emails are reserved for the most important information to the University.
12. Internal communications channels

a. **Student webpages**
   (www2.le.ac.uk/students)
   
   **Regular updates to** –
   Announcements, Latest News

   **AUDIENCE/STAKEHOLDER** Students
   
   **PURPOSE** For general news, announcements, student successes and campaigns. Selected announcements will be included in the weekly Insider email.
   
   **RESPONSIBILITY** Internal Communications/News team
   
   **FREQUENCY** Updated daily

b. **Staff webpages**
   (www2.le.ac.uk/staff)
   
   **Regular updates to** –
   Announcements, Latest News, Bulletin Board

   **AUDIENCE/STAKEHOLDER** Staff
   
   **PURPOSE** For general news, announcements, staff successes, appointments to senior posts and campaigns. Selected announcements will be included in the weekly Insider email.
   
   **RESPONSIBILITY** Internal Communications/News team
   
   **FREQUENCY** Updated daily

c. **Newsblog**
   (www2.le.ac.uk/news/blog)
   
   Easily digestible versions of latest press releases

   **AUDIENCE/STAKEHOLDER** Staff and students
   
   **PURPOSE** Managed by the news team, these are more informal bite-sized pieces of news, usually adapted from a press release, but also used for post-event write-ups.
   
   **RESPONSIBILITY** News team
   
   **FREQUENCY** Updated daily
d. **Social media**

Twitter – twitter.com/uniofleicester
Facebook – facebook.com/UniofLeicester
LinkedIn – linkedin.com/company/university-of-leicester
Youtube – youtube.com/UniversityLeicester
Instagram – instagram.com/uniofleicester
G+ – plus.google.com/117567742134339880689

**AUDIENCE/STAKEHOLDER** Students mostly, but also staff

**PURPOSE** Social media can be an integral part of many campaigns, but should be used sparingly. Talk to the team to start planning and see whether your request can be accommodated.

**RESPONSIBILITY** Abi Kelly/Vic Russell/Internal Communications

**FREQUENCY** Several updates per day

e. **Student blogs**

Providing a student view on life at the university and the student experience. Mostly as a recruitment tool, but has great potential as a way to highlight great student experience.

**AUDIENCE/STAKEHOLDER** Students and external audience

**PURPOSE** Our team of student bloggers talk about their university experience in a range of informal blogs. Sometimes we can feed in suggestions for topics.

**RESPONSIBILITY** Vic Russell

**FREQUENCY** As and when blogs come in

f. **Staff blogs and Think Leicester**

**AUDIENCE/STAKEHOLDER** Students and external audience

**PURPOSE** A network of staff bloggers write on areas of interest to them. This is useful in highlighting areas of research and university ideas. We have recently launched a University Leadership Team blog.

**RESPONSIBILITY** Vic Russell

**FREQUENCY** Ongoing
g. **Insider email**

Sent every Wednesday summarising latest news stories, events etc

**AUDIENCE/STAKEHOLDER**: Staff and students  

**PURPOSE**: Sent to all staff, this is an e-newsletter of key university information and takes information from the staff and student webpages. If you wish to be featured please talk to Internal Communications.  

**RESPONSIBILITY**: News team/Internal Communications  

**FREQUENCY**: Weekly

h. **Face-to-face engagement**

Whether as part of a meeting, address to staff, one-to-ones, personal tutor meetings or ad hoc.

**AUDIENCE/STAKEHOLDER**: Staff and students  

**PURPOSE**: This is everyone’s responsibility, but managers and representative roles in particular.  

**RESPONSIBILITY**: Managers/representative roles  

**FREQUENCY**: Ongoing

i. **Internal and external notice boards**

Display posters and information on internal Careers notice boards in buildings around the campus.

**AUDIENCE/STAKEHOLDER**: Staff and students  

**PURPOSE**: These to be used only as part of an ongoing campaign. Space is limited and too much information leads the boards to be ignored.  

**RESPONSIBILITY**: Within colleges/departments  

**FREQUENCY**: As required
12. Internal communications channels (continued)

j. All-user staff emails

- **AUDIENCE/STAKEHOLDER**: Staff
- **PURPOSE**: Only used for top level communications.
- **RESPONSIBILITY**: Registrar/Vice-Chancellor/Internal Communications
- **FREQUENCY**: Very rarely as per guidelines

k. All-user student emails

- **AUDIENCE/STAKEHOLDER**: Students
- **PURPOSE**: Only used for top level communications.
- **RESPONSIBILITY**: Registrar/Vice-Chancellor/Internal Communications
- **FREQUENCY**: Very rarely as per guidelines

l. Yammer

Recently introduced to the University, Yammer is an internal social network that can be used as an online ‘meeting room’ to share, collaborate and network with colleagues.

- **AUDIENCE/STAKEHOLDER**: Staff
- **PURPOSE**: An ‘online meeting room’. For informal networking, project work, group discussions, asking questions.
- **RESPONSIBILITY**: Open to everyone (including students so be aware when posting). You can post information within groups, either public or private. Guidelines available on the website. You can post information within groups, either public or private.
- **FREQUENCY**: Daily – we see this as a replacement for large group emails and a great tool for collaboration
Appendix B: Template communications plan

Project title
Communications Plan
Date

Introduction
Brief project summary

Objectives of communications plan
• A few bullet points…..
• …outlining clear and measurable objectives of the communications activity

Approach to communications
(include description of how this benefits the project)
• Transparent, so staff feel that they can trust the comms
• Timely, as we must ensure that people are aware ahead of the launch
• Regular, to ensure people feel informed
• Consistent, to build trust further

Key messages
• A few key messages for the communications….
• …which will be applied consistently…..
• …and form a basis for all messaging on the subject

Stakeholder mapping matrix (use list below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFLUENCE</th>
<th>INTEREST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep satisfied/meet their needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually the person running the project who will need to see the outcome, but is not the target of the comms.</td>
<td>Manage/key players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep informed/show consideration</td>
<td>People who are the key focus of your comms and will have a say in the content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal effort/least important</td>
<td>Keep informed/show consideration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with a low interest in your initiative combined with their low power places few demands on your comms.</td>
<td>High interest in what you are doing, but relatively low power.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. Appendix C: all-user email guidance

As part of the proposals for improving Internal Communications at the University of Leicester, we propose that the Internal Communications function has the ability to send out all-user emails to staff and students when required.

This function is currently held by the University’s registrar, and emails are sent very rarely. We would continue this approach, with the caveat that some all-user communications would be of benefit to the wider university community. This is backed up by the recent staff and student communication surveys which indicated majority support for occasional all-user emails.

It is proposed that four email addresses would have the ability to send all-user emails and any all-user emails would be scheduled via Internal Communications to ensure there is no cross-over.

- **vc@le.ac.uk** – major university announcements (e.g., strategic plan)
- **provost@le.ac.uk** – calls for involvement in university campaigns
- **registrar@le.ac.uk** – professional service announcements (can be more targeted)
- **communications@le.ac.uk** – operational announcements and student emails

It is important to set limits on this, so to ensure we are using this channel correctly an email will only be sent out if it falls into the categories below:

- **Change communications** (restructures, relocations, redundancies, VC announcements)
- **Crisis communications** (reputation damage, issues arising from change, emergency announcements)

**All-user emails:**

- If your message meets the criteria above, please contact the internal communications team to discuss the best channel
- Once copy for the message has been agreed, you must ensure it has been signed off by the relevant Director/Manager in your department
- The named person should then forward the email to internal communications with their written endorsement of the message

Internal Communications (and Registrar) will have the final say on whether emails are sent to all users, but will work with you to attempt to find the most suitable medium and method for any promotion.

Internal Communications is continually working to improve the university’s communication channels. If you have any suggestions for improvements, please contact Ross Tarbard, Senior Internal Communications Officer by emailing rmt22@le.ac.uk.