



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

Internal Communications at the University of Leicester
Staff research report

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The University faces a number of challenges in communicating with staff, not least of which the myriad sources of information and the lack of a consistent oversight and voice.

While we have existing channels for communicating with staff, these are ineffective, and this research highlights a number of issues which will need to be addressed in order to meet our aim of improving communication across the university.

These objectives link directly to two key strands of the new Strategic Plan, firstly by supporting a discovery-enabling culture where staff benefit from a collegial and collaborative approach, and as part of a digital future which will help us to deliver a discovery-enabling environment.

As part of our work to improve communications channels we surveyed staff on their experience of the main channels currently used.

- **The Insider weekly email**, sent on Wednesdays to all staff
- **All-user emails**, sent occasionally by the VC office or Registrar
- **Staff webpages**, jointly managed by IC and the News Office
- **LE1 magazine**, produced biannually by Marketing and Communications

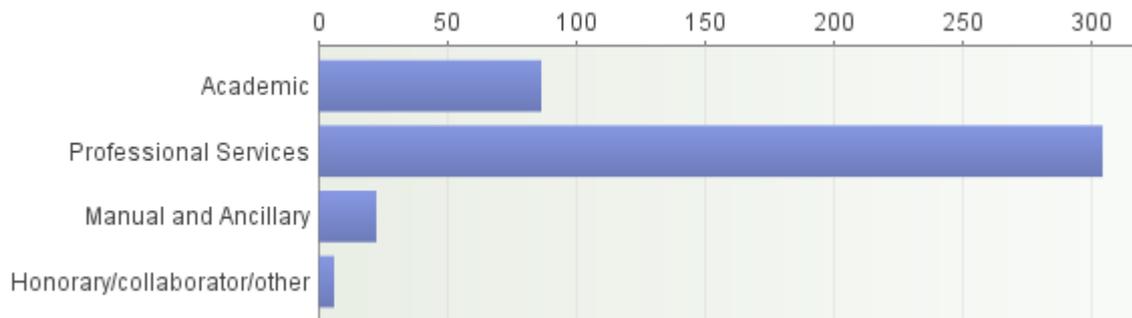
This was accompanied by questions about how staff consume central communications.

This report is split into eight separate sections

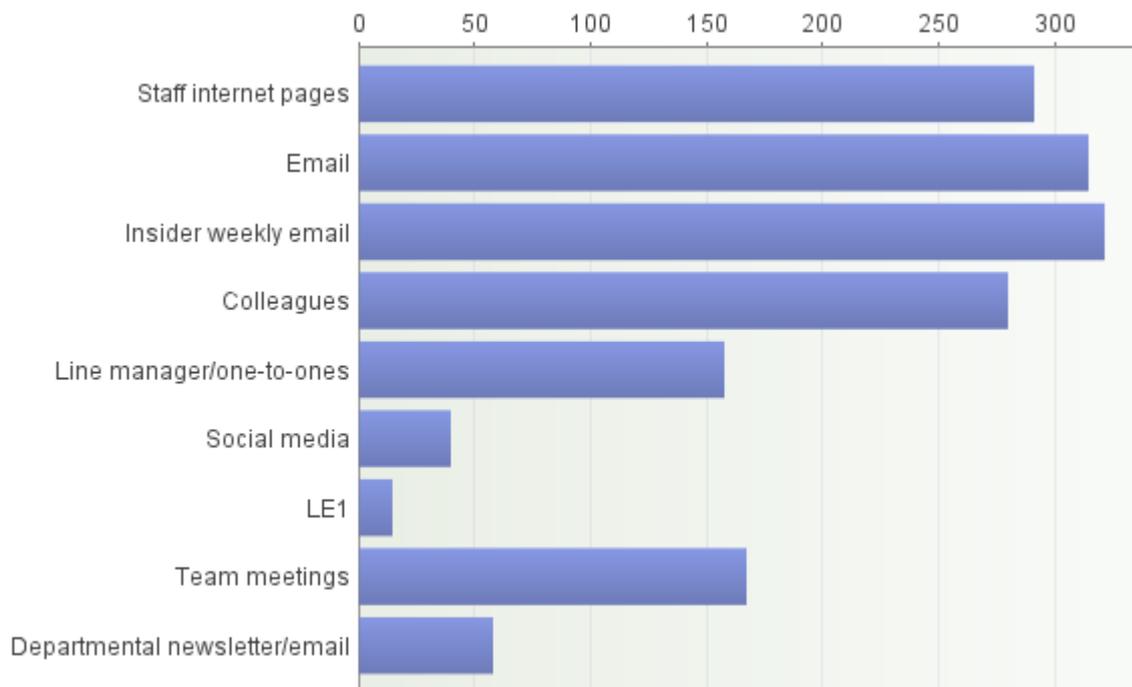
1. **Audience and consumption**
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1. Audience and consumption

Of the 428 people who filled in the survey, the majority were Professional Services staff, with a smaller proportion of academic staff. They worked mostly on campus, with some spending time away, and the overwhelming majority usually have access to the internet and email (though special consideration needs to be given to manual and ancillary staff who rely on face-to-face and paper-based comms due to their lack of access to digital channels).



Staff usually get their information through digital channels, with the weekly Insider email (which provides links to the staff webpages), email and the staff webpages being the most commonly chosen. A significant number of people also selected colleagues as a major source of information, highlighting how important it is to not neglect traditional face-to-face communications.



We asked people to rank the methods in which they get their information, with the ranking as follows.

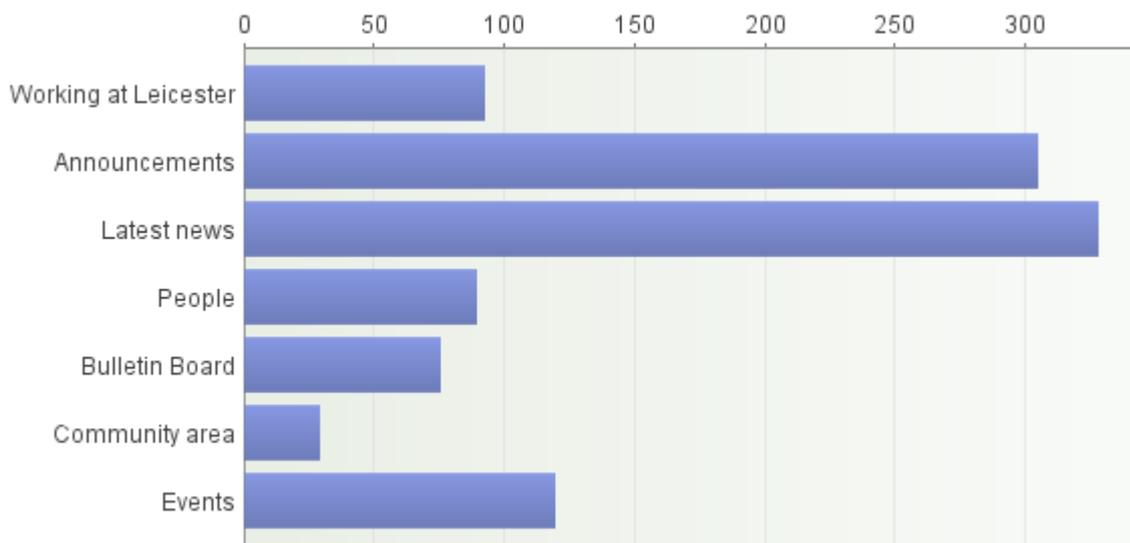
1. Desktop computer (including laptop)
2. Face-to-face
3. Mobile device (smartphone/tablet)
4. Digital noticeboard

5. Traditional noticeboard
6. Paper-based newsletter

2. Staff internet pages

The staff internet pages appear every time someone opens a browser at their desktop, hence they are one of the most common ways of getting information, and the majority of people view them every day.

However, the webpages are inconsistently used, and staff voiced their frustration at the lack of coherency behind the pages. We asked which sections staff usually look at. Unsurprisingly the main news sections came out on top and there are some areas that people very rarely look at, this is likely to be down to the layout of the page, with announcements and latest news featured at the top. Although events is at the bottom of the page, and did very well in this question which shows people will scroll down if there is information they want.



While more people than not felt the staff website was effective, the sheer volume of comments on the survey (more than 150) told another story, and I have used some direct quotes to illustrate the most common complaints.

Organisation

“It looks old fashioned and complicated”

“I am not sure of the difference between announcements and latest news”

“Too many sections, need a single feed for all types of news”

“It’s a dumping ground for information with no logical approach to categorising or prioritising items”

“I just noticed something called Think Leicester; i have no idea what this is. Where are the blogs?”

Tone

“Too focused on academic staff”

“It doesn’t engage staff or encourage two-way dialogue”

“It’s not very good at raising awareness of other items of interest or ongoing initiatives”

“There needs to be more imagery, videos and social media elements”

“Much of the news is aimed at outside users”

Usability

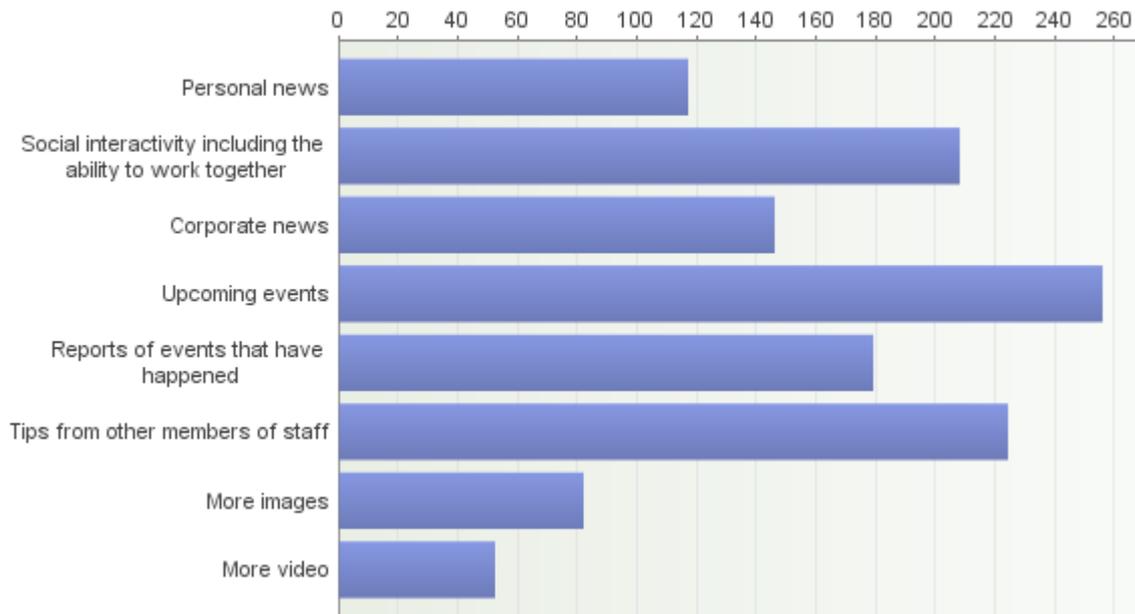
“Too much text, too many pages, it needs a major overhaul”

“I only use it as a gateway to phone and email directory, HR and ITS”

“Very hard to navigate”

“It’s very difficult to find events even if you know they are happening

From the level of comments it is clear that the staff webpages do not function effectively, and that the news and content is not focused on the needs of staff, as when asked what could make staff communication better, these were the results:



From an administrator point of view the staff webpages are a mess. There:

- Is no logical structure to the way in which things are currently put together
- Are no sections within the structure in which to host ongoing staff-focused campaigns
- Are seven different sources of news on the homepage
- Are a whole host of other staff-focused webpages dotted around the website which are not easy to find
- Is a mix of internally and externally focused content, when all this information should be aimed at staff
- A lack of awareness of good user-generated content (Think Leicester and staff blogs)

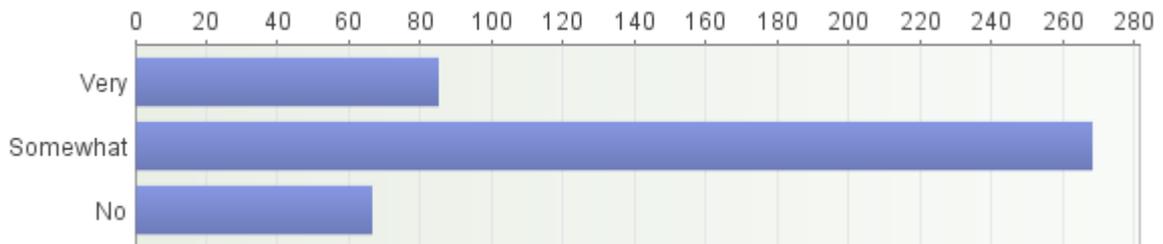
Our webpages are generally arranged to mirror the structure of the University. One quote stood out from the rest amongst staff/student feedback and I will highlight it here as the overarching approach to this

“Don’t make me navigate your organisation”

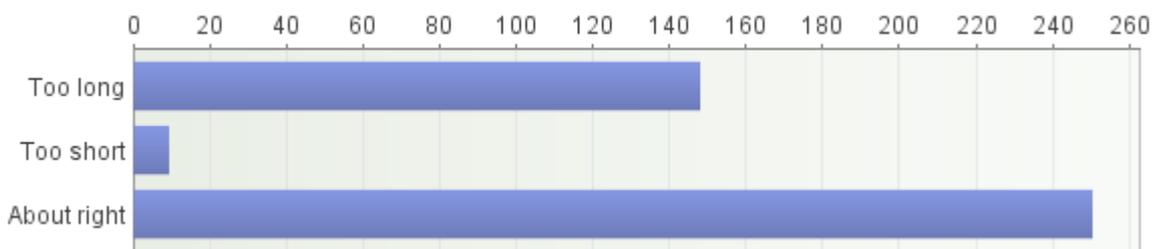
3. Insider

Anecdotally, Insider has been much maligned by staff around the University, and while it is clearly an effective tool for getting information to staff, there is a great deal of room for improvement.

The majority of staff read Insider every week and find it somewhat effective.



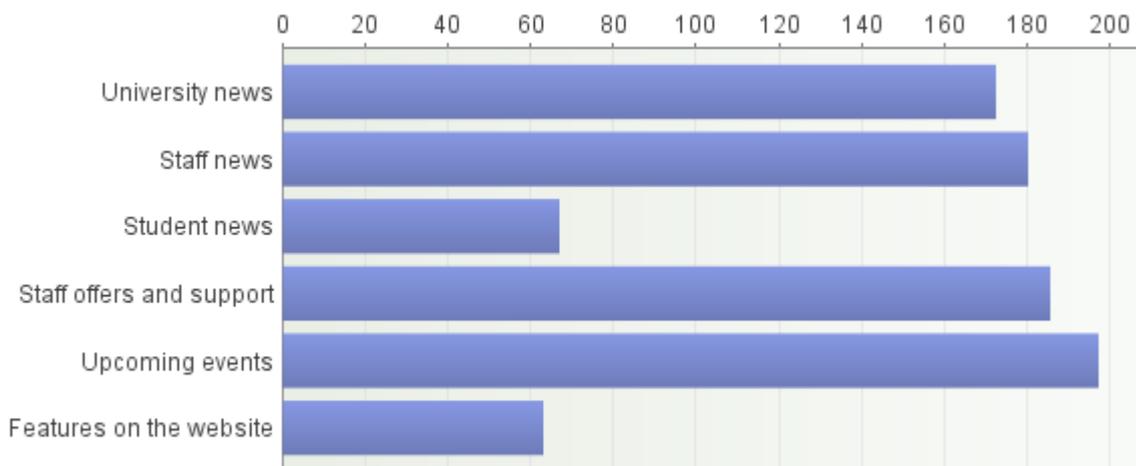
A large number of people think it is too long, but more people think it's 'about right'



When people were queried anecdotally about this, they admitted that although they were unsatisfied by Insider currently, they “didn’t know what they would cut out”.

It is clear that Insider does not function as a quick new digest for staff. The edition dated 14 October 2015 ran to 5 printed A4 pages, contained 1651 words and had 68 separate links to news stories, events and training sessions. This has a detrimental effect on the good news in the newsletter, which can be (and often is) missed thanks to the sheer volume of content.

When asked what they’d like to see more of included within Insider, these were the results:



In a follow-up survey, some comments on Insider were

“I don’t know whether the Insider is a staff newsletter, for students or both. It doesn’t feel like it ticks any of those boxes as well as it should”

“I don’t understand the different sections in the Insider – Essentially it is all news. Maybe this could be split into sections by college/division or staffing updates, campus updates (include estates), what’s on etc.”

“Make it look better, not just a huge list. Have to scroll through huge list of research events which I am not interested in. click links to sections instead?”

“It also feels like we don’t engage staff with activities that are happening in the student union or student sports group. The students’ union do lots of charity work and staff could help with this too. There are lots of sports groups and I am sure there are student v’s staff games but I have never seen anything about them.”

“There is too much to ever get through in a week”

“I think the main reason I don’t read it is because when I try to, it feels like my eyeballs are being assaulted with a sea of links and text.”

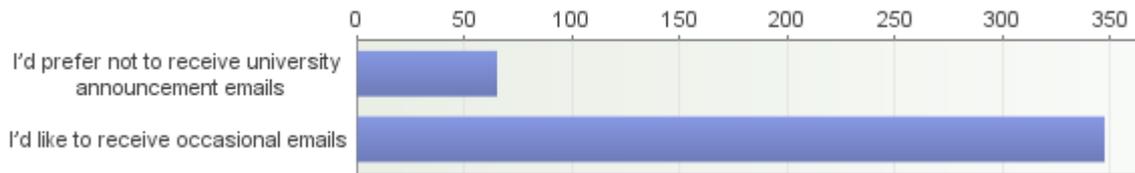
“Some images would probably brighten it up and make it a bit easier on the eye.”

“There are also a lot of items not relevant or interesting to me personally, and some of the more interesting ones can get hidden because of this. Clearly what people find interesting is different across the University though so I can appreciate knowing what to emphasise would be hard.”

“In an ideal world I think it would be nice to be able to say what interests us, and then receive news relevant to this.”

4. All-user emails

Currently, the use of all-user emails has been restricted to the Vice-Chancellor's office and the Registrar. Centrally the University does not send all-user emails. The survey reveals there is appetite for this to happen.



Any new all-user email accounts owned by Internal Communications would need a strict set of guidelines drawn up.

5. Social media

While there are more people who don't use social media for their job compared to those who do, the sheer volume of comments in response to this question show that more and more people are using it as a key element of their role. It is therefore worth investigating ways in which social media could be integrated into internal communications.

The ways in which people use a range of social media from Twitter and blogs, to Facebook and LinkedIn include:

“Sharing corporate activities”

“Professional collaboration”

“Supporting my research network”

“Marketing and networking”

“Engaging with students on the course”

“Tweeting about university events which are relevant to my job and colleagues”

“Promoting the external profile of my department and the University”

6. LE1 magazine

LE1 is a research-focused magazine produced for the University community and some external partners. We asked if staff had read the magazine before.



While a majority of responders who had read it enjoyed it, there were a number of comments questioning its purpose as an internal communication tool.

“All felt quite old”

“Doesn’t seem particularly relevant”

“I felt I already knew all the content”

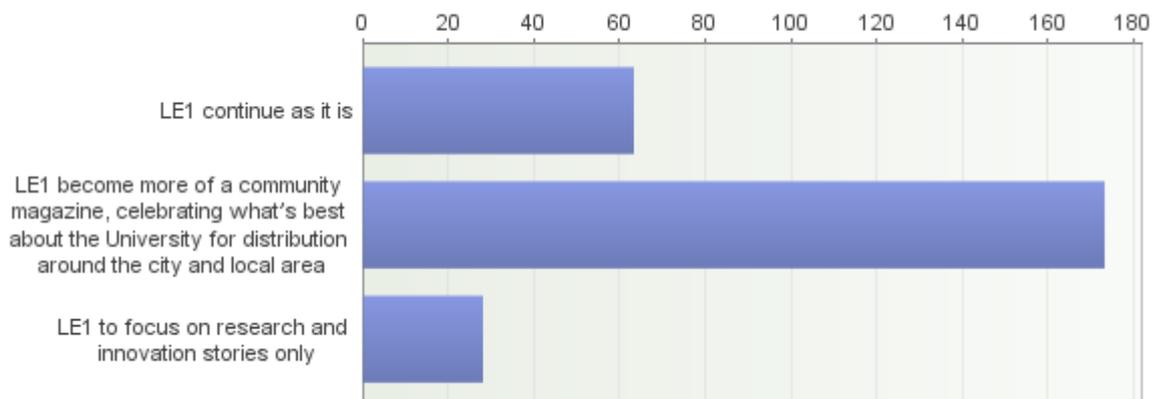
“More could be made of higher profile news, how the University interacts with the city and county”

“I’m not sure who it’s aimed at”

“The publication is trying to do too many things. It should focus on the outward face”

“It feels quite 'high brow' and aimed at researchers or external stakeholders”

Most people would prefer to see LE1 continue in a different format, and would rather have an online version (though many did argue for retaining printed copies). There was overwhelming support for LE1 having a shift of focus and becoming an external magazine.



7. Conclusions

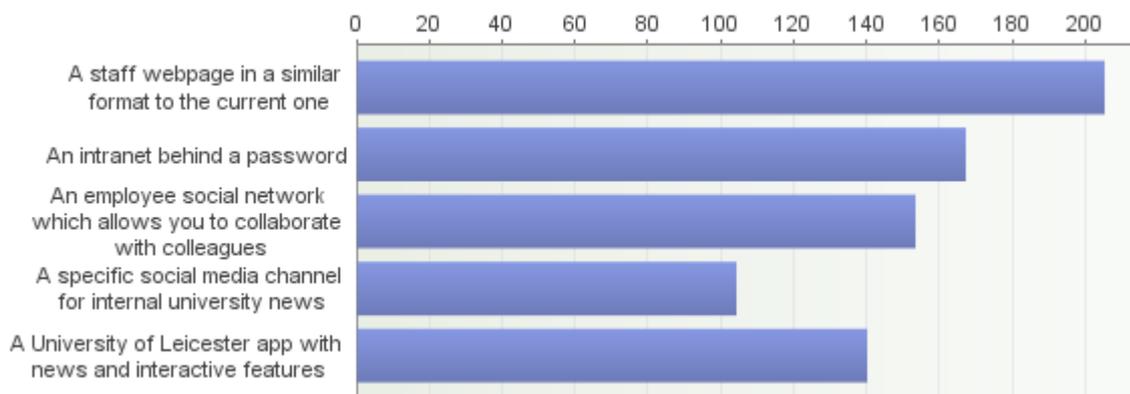
There is a lot that is good about internal communication at Leicester. The channels we have are well-established, and a lot of the content is good. It does seem however that there is a lot of room for improvement.

People are bombarded with information and are unsure as to where to go to access that information, whether it is resources needed to do their job, or simply news.

The staff website and Insider need the most work. It is clear that restructuring of the staff website is essential in order to provide staff with an effective and useful resource for going about their day-to-day job as currently it meets no-one's needs. And before Insider can be revitalised, it needs to be linking to well-structured content.

Thanks to existing IT solutions there is the potential to start moving into a more digital communication world while not forgetting those staff who still rely on traditional methods.

When asked what they wanted to see in the future, staff chose the following options.



8. Proposals

My proposals for improving internal communications at the University of Leicester on the basis of this research are

Staff internet pages

It is clear that these need a lot of work. Information is confused; there are too many pages, too much information and too many news sources for staff. I have already audited the pages and other staff-related pages across the rest of the website in readiness.

Proposal: The staff webpages need to be rationalised. In conjunction with relevant content owners:

- Consolidate news into one or two streams. Investigate whether tagging can make this easier to personalise
- Identification and inclusion of more staff-focused news, merging the news feeds would go a long way to increasing the visibility of this type of news
- Better integration of user-generated content (Think Leicester and staff blogs)
- Move information into easily browsable sections (use the IT user experience team for user testing), information structured by theme and use rather than by department
- Liaise with IT and web teams to ensure the website will be Sitecore-ready
 - Consideration of merging the directories*
- Include more imagery and video and integrate interactive/social elements where possible
- More emphasis on events (potentially with calendar of next 3 or so upcoming events)
- Begin to use analytics to get some more fine detail on how the pages are used

Insider

The Insider weekly email is currently managed by the News Team.

Proposal: Once improvements to the website are in motion, the responsibility for this should pass to Internal Communications.

- Reduce the amount of text within Insider
- Reduce the number of sections within Insider
- Include only 'new' news and events, not everything
- Undertake further research into exactly what staff want from Insider and when they want it sent
- Track links to see who is clicking what

All-user emails

Proposal: Internal Communications should have the ability to send large scale email communications to the University community.

- Find out exactly who has the ability to send emails to more than 500 people
- Draw up guidelines for large-scale email communications

- Gain permission for Internal Communications to own an email address which can send to all staff and students
- Set up communications@le.ac.uk as the email address
- Distribute guidelines and information about this new way of communicating

LE1 magazine

It is clear that staff would like to see this change.

Proposal: LE1 to become an externally-focused magazine showcasing what is best about the University to the Leicester community, still aimed at being an interesting online read for staff and students, but targeted at improving the reputation of the University locally, and as a tool for student recruitment.

Employee social network

There is appetite for staff to work digitally, and as the University's Strategic Plan commits to creating a 'digital campus', online workspaces will need to become a part of the University's 'business as usual'. With the potential for a new Space Park campus on the other side of the city, ensuring that staff can work together online in a seamless and interdisciplinary manner should be a priority for the University.

This does require a culture change, but any employee social network would need to have the benefits clearly articulated.

Proposal: Through the Microsoft Office 365 suite, staff have access to Skype for Business and Yammer, both of which allow more interactive ways of working and collaborating.

- Hold discussions with IT Services about Internal Communications 'taking on' Yammer as a comms project
- Investigate and articulate the potential applications of Yammer and Skype for Business at the University
- Create guidelines for the use of Yammer as an internal social network
- Champion and promote the use of Yammer and Skype for Business with trials on particular projects.
- Yammer could also play a part in replacing the under-used 'community' area of the staff webpages.

Other developments

- Look into the current University of Leicester app and how this could be improved. It still works, but is a little clunky and it's not clear of the audience or purpose. Students (and some staff) also want to see something like this so we should at least investigate how to improve it, this will be dealt with under student comms proposals.

Communications Champions

Create a network of Communications Champions, voluntary and supportive role which aim to improve communication within and between departments and colleges.

The Champions will represent a diverse range of audiences and communication needs across professional services departments and colleges. This is particularly important for the academic community and manual workers with limited computer access, where face-to-face, word of mouth and cascade-style communication is a vital part of keeping people informed.

They will work as a two way conduit of information, to keep the Internal Comms team abreast of issues and helping to cascade messages into departments and divisions.