



Advice to Members Regarding Work Emails

POLICY & GUIDANCE FOR BRANCH NEGOTIATORS

EIS-ULA Advice to Members Regarding Work Emails

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Emails are a medium of communication and together with modern technology have become a ubiquitous part of our working lives, and increasingly, in workers' personal lives. Over-use of emails generate 'long hours' working and a failure to 'disconnect' from work. These have been shown to adversely affect the health and mortality of workers, workplace relationships and to reduce the quality of work¹. The adoption of emails as the standard communication means has been rapid and email protocols/policies have been slow to develop, possibly as it has taken time for workers and employers to understand the risks associated with email working.

This advice to members, which complements a model staff email policy that the EIS is seeking to agree with University employers, is designed to help members to manage work emails so that their work-life balance and health is improved. This advice should not lead to any detriment in the quality of members' work, indeed, ultimately, in the long term it may also improve members' work too.

Universities, as employers, have a duty of care towards their staff and we would not expect any employers to object to the advice set out below.

- 1.** Do not routinely read or write emails outwith your normal working hours. The EIS advises you to "disconnect" from your work. The normal weeknight or weekend should not involve reading or writing emails. Clearly, in exceptional circumstances or during short intense periods of work this may be necessary, but this should not be the norm.
- 2.** If you have a work smartphone or read work emails with your personal phone, then give careful consideration as to how frequently you check work emails. 'Dipping in' to your work emails whilst doing other activities outwith working hours means that you are emotionally and mentally at work, even if you are physically elsewhere. This, over the long term, may affect your mental health or relationships.
- 3.** Doing work emails just before going to bed² or before going to sleep is likely to adversely affect your sleep. If you find stopping doing your emails on your smartphone difficult then consider uninstalling the workplace email account from your personal smartphone or switching off notifications for work emails. Alternatively, leave your smartphone outside the bedroom overnight.
- 4.** Your employer's Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy apply to the emails that you receive and send. Emails are subject to the same laws and policies

¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563214005810>
<https://source.colostate.edu/anticipatory-stress-of-after-hours-email-exhausting-employees/>
https://behavioralpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/BSP_vol1is1_Goh.pdf

² A study published in [Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes](#) found that upper-level managers who used their phones after 9 p.m. experienced decreases in quantity and quality of sleep.

that apply to other forms of communication, and therefore must be composed with care as they may be used in evidence against you. Consider your tone when sending emails, particularly emails sent in haste. Never send an email that you would not be comfortable discussing with your line-manager at some point in the future.

- 5.** All work-related emails and instant messages are subject to GDPR, so be careful with sharing confidential information including 3rd parties' email addresses. You may wish to use password protected attachments. Freedom of Information legislation also applies to Universities, and if requested your emails may be legally admissible, i.e. shared to colleagues or 3rd parties that make a request to see them.
- 6.** In cases of planned absence, staff should set up an out-of-office message. This is a means of letting the sender know that you will not be reading or responding to this email for a specified period of time. You may put in a colleague's contact details (with her/his consent) if you are away for some time.
- 7.** Whilst email responses should be made within a reasonable and meaningful timeframe, most responses do not need to be made during the same day.
- 8.** Time spent reading, writing, and reviewing emails is defined as working time as set out by the Working Time Regulations. If you are only able to carry out your job by consistently working long hours (on emails) then you may need to discuss changing your workload with your employer.
- 9.** Emails should be checked regularly during the working week but should not be routinely checked when carrying out tasks or in meetings. If you are carrying out a piece of work, then you should not be expected to check your email during that time. This may mean changing your email notifications so that you are not distracted.
- 10.** Care and consideration should be given as to whether an email is the appropriate medium to deal with the matter at hand. Matters that are likely to cause disappointment or dismay, for example, are best dealt in meetings. Likewise, do not feel you have to reply in kind to emails – you may choose to discuss it directly with the sender.
- 11.** Workplace email systems are tools provided by your employer to carry out work. Whilst most employers do not mind some personal use of workplace emails, ultimately, all work email addresses and emails within the work email system are the property of the University. The University should have a IT policy that outlines the reasonable use of email/internet for personal use and the conditions under which it may access the emails in your work email system.