Email and Messaging Policy

June 2024

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Territorial Scope	University Group, Global

HERIOT-WATT UNIVERSITY
EMAIL AND MESSAGING POLICY AND GUIDANCE
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EMAIL AND MESSAGING POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This policy sets out the University's expectations for how employees and other people working for or on behalf of the University Group should use email and other electronic communications, such as instant messaging or 'chat' in Teams. We are all responsible for using these tools appropriately to support effective and collaborative working and create accurate and accountable records of actions and decisions.

1.2 This policy recognises that we work in a continuously evolving technological environment. Any communications we send in the course of our work for the University are subject to the same legal requirements that govern any other recorded information. These communications include, but are not limited to messages sent by email, Microsoft Teams 'chat', SMS (text messages), social network posts, group chat and other messaging applications such as WhatsApp.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 When using email or messaging applications for University communications, all colleagues are expected to:

A. Communicate with courtesy and respect at all times, in accordance with the University's values:

- *Belong to a diverse, inclusive and international community working together across boundaries and cultures*

- *Inspire curiosity to learn and find solutions that transform lives*

- *Collaborate by working in partnership to shape the future whilst taking responsibility for our own actions*

- *Celebrate excellence and take pride in the achievements of our students, staff and alumni*

B. Use your Heriot-Watt University IT account or phone number for communications relating to university work. Use approved Heriot-Watt University communication channels and tools. Don't automatically forward messages from your University account to another account. Don't use any personal accounts, channels or tools for any communications with students (e.g. personal mobile number, email account, social media profile).

C. Avoid using your Heriot-Watt University IT account for personal purposes to reduce the likelihood of falling for a phishing scam, and always follow the IT and Communications Facilities Acceptable Use Policy.

D. Use the communications medium appropriate for the purpose, the information to be conveyed and the action needed. Follow corporate governance processes and ensure relevant decisions are endorsed or approved by the appropriate University committee and recorded in the committee's minutes and papers.

E. Share enough information with the right people in a timely manner.

F. Show consideration for your recipients; they have commitments and deadlines of their own.

G. Understand that anything recorded in communications on University business may need to be disclosed either in a court of law or in response to a freedom of information request or a data subject request under data protection law.

H. Protect personal data and other confidential information by following the Information Security Policy Framework and accompanying standards.

I. Check your recipients before you send or post each message to avoid accidental oversharing.

J. Retain and delete emails and messages in accordance with the Information Governance and Records Management Policy and accompanying retention schedules, so that we keep information for as long as needed, but no longer. Some messages, for example those relating to decisions integral to the University's corporate memory may be retained permanently for cultural and research purposes as part of the University Museum and Archive.

K. Follow the University's Email and Messaging Guidance in Appendix 1 of this Policy.

3. SCOPE

3.1 This policy applies to:

- Everyone working on behalf of organisations within the University Group, including employees, casual workers, contractors, agents, those with an honorary or voluntary role and members of the governing body.

- All university campuses and all locations from which we send or receive communications in the course of our work for the University, whether in the office or working remotely.

- All text and images or recordings sent by all means of electronic communications on university business whether using a university account or a personal account. This includes, but is not limited to: email, Microsoft Teams 'chat' messages and channel posts, SMS (text messages), social network and media posts, blogs and group messaging applications such as WhatsApp.

4. LINES OF RESPONSIBILITY

4.1 **Everyone** who communicates in the course of their work is individually accountable for how and what they communicate.

4.2 The lines of responsibility for colleagues in specific roles for implementing, monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of this policy and guidance are as set out in the University's Information Governance and Records Management Policy.

5. RELATED POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND FURTHER REFERENCE

Policies

5.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with all other university information governance policies, are published on the University website at Our policies | Heriot-Watt University. These include:

- IT and Communications Facilities Acceptable Use Policy

- Data Protection Policy

- Information Governance and Records Management Policy

- Information Security Policy Framework and its constituent policies, procedures and standards

- Right to Information Policy

- Collections Management and Development Policy

Procedures

5.2   This Policy should be read in conjunction with university information governance procedures, which are reviewed and updated as necessary to meet the University's business needs and legal obligations. Relevant procedures are published on the University website. These include:

- Retention schedules

- Records Destruction Procedures

Legal Requirements and external standards

5.3   Details of legislation that places specific obligations on organisations in relation to managing information in emails, messages and other records, together with relevant definitions, can be found in the [Information Governance and Records Management Policy](#) and [Information Security Policy Framework.](#)

5.4   Information Governance staff can advise on specific legal and regulatory requirements affecting email and electronic communications.

6.   DEFINITIONS

Email:	Short for 'electronic mail'. In the University's context, emails are sent and received using Microsoft Outlook. Messages are sent over the University network and the open Internet. Emails replaced traditional paper memos for internal written communication.
Private Teams chat:	Chat messages which appear under the 'Chat' tab in the Microsoft Teams App. These include one to one (1:1) exchanges, one to many (1:N) exchanges, and meeting chat (except for meetings which take place in a channel).
Teams Channel posts:	These are messages which appear in a channel within a 'Team' in the Microsoft Teams App. They include meeting 'chat' when the meeting takes place in a 'channel'.
WhatsApp:	A social media service with which two people or a group of people can send messages, photos, and videos to each other. Each WhatsApp account needs to be linked to a phone number.

7.   FURTHER HELP AND ADVICE

Information Governance
Email: Infogov@hw.ac.uk

Human Resources Development
Email: HRHelp@hw.ac.uk

8.   POLICY VERSION AND HISTORY

Version No	Date of Approval	Approving Authority	Brief Description of Amendment
V2.3 27/04/2019		University Executive	University values listed in policy.
V4.1 25/06/2024	25/06/2024	University Executive	Revisions to bring the Policy up to date with current technology and HWU policy landscape.

APPENDIX 1: EMAIL AND MESSAGING GUIDANCE

This guidance is also available on the Information Governance Intranet pages at Email and Messaging Guidance (sharepoint.com).

Use the right tool for the job, in the right way, so the technology does the boring routine work, giving you time to focus on the interesting and valuable work

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1. KNOW THE LAW

Your messages represent the University

Emails and instant messages have the same authority as any other communication to or from our university. Binding contracts can inadvertently be created this way.

Always use your Heriot-Watt account for all email and other communications you send in the course of your work, for security and business continuity and to confirm who you represent. Be aware that if you choose to use a personal account to communicate for work, these messages are also covered by our legal obligations.

Take care with the language you use

Avoid abrupt, inappropriate, flippant, and inconsiderate use of language which may be misunderstood, or which may come across as bullying or defamatory.

All work communications are open to scrutiny

No messages you send or receive as part of your work for the University are private. All emails, Team 'chat' and other electronic messages or posts are legally discoverable in response to an information rights request (for example a freedom of information or data subject request) or in a court of law.

Using a personal account (e.g. WhatsApp or gmail) doesn't avoid these obligations, it just makes it much more difficult for you to comply with your obligations.

If you don't name someone in an email or message about them it doesn't make that communication exempt from disclosure – just a lot harder to find within the legal deadline (we must respond to most requests within a maximum of four weeks).

There are also times when the University may need to access the content of your account. These circumstances are limited and are governed by specific and proportionate protocols. University staff can read more about these protocols on the Information Governance Intranet at Authorising access to a user's IT account or CCTV recording (sharepoint.com).

2. USE THE RIGHT COMMUNICATION TOOL FOR THE JOB

Teams' channels: the place to do the work

If there's a Microsoft Team for a collaborative piece of work, and you need to communicate with Team members about that work, the Team is probably where the conversation should take place. Conversations within a Microsoft Team can take place in real-time as a channel meeting, or asynchronously as channel posts. Any meeting 'chat' will appear in the channel and be accessible to everyone in the channel. Before starting a new post, check if your message relates to an existing post and reply to that one rather than creating a new post (see below When replying, 'reply'; don't create a new message). Only @mention those who need to action your message. The retention period for channel posts is set at the Team level, allowing different Teams to have different retention periods. Guidance on working in channels, including how to schedule a meeting in a channel, is at Work in channels - Microsoft Support.

Email: a place for formal documented conversations to move work forward

If your communication doesn't fit into a Team channel, email remains the best option for formal internal electronic communications and for electronic communications with most external recipients. Email is a good option for any messages that need to be retained for:

- Legal or regulatory purposes, i.e. supporting or demonstrating the University's compliance with any legal obligation or regulatory requirement.

- Accountability purposes, e.g. providing evidence that the University (or anyone acting on the University's behalf) has acted correctly and in accordance with its rights and obligations. This includes explaining the actions we took and why we took or didn't take a particular action, and how we arrived at a particular decision.

- Business purposes, i.e. any purposes which support the University's functions and activities.

If you need an immediate response, call

If you need an immediate response, a voice or video call is probably the best option. Before you call, check your recipient's 'availability status', and respect it. Guidance on how to set your availability status is at Change your status in Microsoft Teams - Microsoft Support.

If you need to document the response, send an email after the call summarising the key points of the conversation.

If it's complex, schedule a meeting

If you need to convey a complex topic, perhaps using visual aids, or you think you'll have a lot of follow-up questions, an online or in-person meeting is probably the best option. Help your recipients to prepare for the conversation. In the meeting invitation, include a clear explanation of the reason for the meeting and provide links to any background information that may help your recipients to prepare for the meeting.

Guidance on how to schedule meetings is at Schedule an appointment or meeting - Microsoft Support.

Does it need to be a video call?

We've all got used to scheduling Teams video calls, which are great when in-person catch-ups aren't possible. But consider whether it could be a voice call instead. Voice calls have a smaller carbon footprint and could give you the opportunity to boost your wellbeing by taking the call away from your desk, perhaps during a walk. If you're scheduling the call, tell participants that it's a voice-only call and that it's an opportunity to take it away from their desk.

If it's a service request, join the queue

If your message is an internal service request, for example a question to a helpdesk, it's likely that there's an online form or an email address to send your request to. Use the correct route to ensure your request is dealt with efficiently.

Private Teams chat is for ephemeral or transitory use only

Transitory information has no significant information or evidential value after it has served its primary temporary purpose. 1:1 or 1:N private Teams chat is the equivalent of going to a colleague's desk and asking them a quick question. Private Teams chat can sometimes be a good way to check whether someone is available for a call on a particular topic. Meeting chat that doesn't take place in a channel is also transitory and should only be used for the immediate purposes of the meeting, e.g. asking questions, providing links to relevant resources, obtaining input from everyone in the meeting.

From 1 August 2024, automated retention and deletion policies will be applied to all private Teams chat messages, see Apply retention and deletion policies.

Substantive work, and especially decision making, must not take place in private chat. If a private chat starts getting into substantive work or decision making, it's time to move it to an email or Teams channel post so that it can be retained in line with the university's retention schedules. Guidance on how to share a Teams chat message to a channel conversation is at Forward a message in a Teams chat - Microsoft Support and by email at Share to Outlook from Microsoft Teams – Microsoft Support.

For synchronous online BSL communications, use an HWU Zoom licence

If one or more participants use British Sign Language, the University recommends using Zoom rather than Microsoft Teams. Guidance on how to obtain a HWU Zoom licence is at Zoom Licence (sharepoint.com) and Communication & Collaboration Software (sharepoint.com).

Use WhatsApp and similar messaging applications with great care

WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram etc. are not approved for university business. The University is unable to manage messages sent and received using these applications and cannot provide support to colleagues using them. If you use these services to send and receive messages on university business, your responsibilities under the

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Email and Messaging Policy remain the same but there is no support to help you, and you may carry greater risks. For example:

- If we receive a subject access request for copies of messages you have sent or received, you will have to extract the messages manually and send them to the Information Governance team.

- If you or the University needs to rely on your messages to provide evidence that you followed University policies and procedures or that you acted appropriately in any given circumstance, it may be more difficult. E.g. it is possible for a student to make a complaint, and submit edited WhatsApp messages making it appear that a member of staff has acted inappropriately. It is then difficult for the University to independently verify (or otherwise) the authenticity of those messages.

Only use an unapproved messaging application for university business if you have no other alternative, and if you:

- Use your university phone number or email address to create the account, not your personal number or email address

- Don't mix personal and professional messages

- Don't use it for substantive work or decision-making

- Don't use it to communicate with students; it's the equivalent of meeting a student privately off-campus

- Regularly delete your messages to ensure that you're retaining information only as long as necessary, as set out in the University's Records Retention Schedules

- If a conversation needs to be retained, export the chat history (How to export your chat history | WhatsApp Help Center), and save it on the right University system (see Capture messages in the right place), but beware that their integrity is likely to be questioned if they are ever needed to provide evidence, e.g. to a court or tribunal.

3. **THINK ABOUT YOUR RECIPIENT AND SECURITY WHEN YOU COMPOSE AND SEND MESSAGES**

Communicate actions and deadlines first, not last

Always include a subject line when the software enables you to do so (e.g. emails and Teams channel posts). Put the 'call to action' and ideal response time in the subject line. Expand on these in the first paragraph of your message. Where applicable, include the reference number in the subject line.

Recommended subject line	Recipients are being asked to…
For comment by [Date]: [Topic] [ref]	Comment on the proposals in the message by the stated date. A response is required.
For approval by [Date]: [Topic] [ref]	Approve the proposals in the message by the stated date. A response is required.
For action by [Date]: [Topic] [ref]	Carry out the actions described in the message by the stated date. A response is required.

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Recommended subject line	Recipients are being asked to…
For advice by [Date]: [Topic] [ref]	Provide advice on the topic by the stated date. A response is required.
For feedback by [Date]: [Topic] [ref]	Take the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposals in the message by the stated date. A response is optional. If no response is received, it will be assumed that no feedback is forthcoming.
For information: [Topic] [ref]	Take no action. No response is required.

Avoid tagging a message as URGENT, IMPORTANT or high priority

If you need a response by a deadline, ask with plenty of time to spare. Your recipients have commitments and deadlines of their own. It is unreasonable to approach someone with an 'urgent' piece of work because your planning didn't take their workload into account.

Only tag a message as urgent, important, or high priority if absolutely necessary. Beware that if a private Teams chat message is tagged as 'urgent' the recipient will be notified every 2 minutes for the next 20 minutes.

Message type	Tagging options	How
Email	Importance tags: High priority, Normal, Low importance	[Mark a message as high or low importance - Microsoft Support](#)
Teams Channel posts	Important	[Mark a message as important or urgent in Microsoft Teams - Microsoft Support](#)
Private Teams chat	Important or Urgent	

Address your message mindfully

Help your recipients to know who you need a response from, and only 'reply all', when it's appropriate. Intensive use of messaging and unnecessarily wide circulation can cause stress to colleagues who are trying to keep up with the number of messages they receive.

Message type	Recipients are receiving the message…	
	to respond or take action	for information only
Email	'To' field @mention within the body of the email for specific actions	'Cc' field
Teams Channel posts	@mention	Post
Private Teams chat	@mention	

Colleagues who receive a large number of messages often triage their messages and may have set their notifications and rules to de-prioritise messages if they don't appear in the 'To' line or are not @mentioned.

Take care when sending bulk emails and use bcc appropriately

An email address that clearly relates to someone (e.g. givenname.familyname@zmail.co.uk), is personal information. Disclosing this type of email address to others can be a data breach.

For example, in 2021 HIV Scotland was fined £10,000 when the charity sent an email to 105 people where all the email addresses were visible to all the recipients. In this case, the UK Information Commissioner (ICO) considered that the context of the email was sensitive, revealing health personal data by implication as all recipients were living with HIV or representing HIV service users, even though there was no sensitive personal information in the body of the email.

If you need to send one email containing the same non-sensitive information to a group of individual recipients use 'bcc' instead of 'to' or 'cc' unless there is a genuine need for the recipients to identify one another. If your group email contains sensitive personal information, or your role requires you to send bulk emails regularly for information e.g. to a group of service users, ask IS and IG for advice about using a specialist email management application for this purpose.

Keep messages short and concise

Think of your recipient. They are busy and don't have time to read long, detailed messages. Use the first 2-3 sentences of your message to clearly set out what you need, and the timescale. Focus on the purpose of your message. Don't address more than one topic in the same message.

If you're requesting feedback or advice, make a clear and constructive proposal or set out the options for consideration so that your recipient knows what action you are seeking from them.

Provide the 'why' last, not first. Give your recipient context, for example background information or an explanation of why you're asking them to do what you've asked, but only after providing the 'what' and 'by when'. For example, provide a 'background' section towards the end of your message or give a link to further information.

Encrypt confidential messages

Avoid sending confidential information in the body of an email. Emails sent over the open internet are not secure. They are more like sending a postcard than a sealed letter. If you have no alternative, encrypt the email. Guidance on how to do so is at Encrypt email messages - Microsoft Support.

When you forward a message 'for information', always provide a summary

Save your recipient time and confusion by providing a short summary of the entire thread and explain why you're forwarding it to them.

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If it's a time-sensitive email, e.g. is raising awareness of an event taking place in a couple of days time, consider adding an expiry date to automatically delete it once it's no longer relevant. Guidance on how to set expiry dates is at Set a message expiration date - Microsoft Support.

Never just say 'hi'; always state your purpose

You wouldn't send an email that just said 'hello' or 'hi' and wait for a response, so don't send an instant message that just says 'hi'. Always state your reason for getting in touch. It's not rude or abrupt, it's efficient. To read more on this, see No Hello: Don't just say 'Hello' in chat.

Share links, not copies of documents

When you send an email attachment each recipient gets a copy of the file. This increases duplication, which increases our carbon footprint, and can lead to confusion about the 'single source of truth'. Moreover, if you accidentally send the email to the wrong recipient, the security breach can be more serious and more difficult to resolve. Instead, send a link to the file. Guidance on how to do so is at Create a shareable link - Microsoft Support.

If you must send confidential information by email attachment, encrypt the file with a strong password. Don't email the password; communicate the password by voice call or instant message.

Share links to documents in private chat rather than upload a copy to the chat. If you upload copies of documents to private chat, a copy of the document is saved to the Microsoft Teams Chat Files folder on your OneDrive – another place you'll need to clear out regularly.

Be inclusive; follow accessibility and plain English guidelines

Format your messages so that they are accessible to all recipients. Find out how at Video: Improve email accessibility - Microsoft Support, and Accessibility (sharepoint.com).

Convey your message using plain English. Avoid using metaphors, idioms or jargon, as they can be baffling for some people, for example some neurodivergent individuals, and those with different cultural references from your own. Find out how at How to write in plain English.doc (plainenglish.co.uk) and Plain English guides (plainenglish.co.uk).

Check before you press "send"

Many breaches of security arise from inadvertently sending emails and other communications to the wrong people.

Before sending	Check...
An email	☐ The recipient name and address. Use the Global Address list to check their role and department, e.g. don't confuse the Jo Blogs who works in HR with the student Joe Bloggs.

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Before sending	Check...
	☐ The email trail to ensure that it doesn't contain any information that shouldn't be disclosed to the intended recipient.
A channel post	☐ Whether the Team is 'public' or 'private'. The content of 'public' Teams is available to every Heriot-Watt University M365 user, which includes students, affiliates and some visitors.
	☐ The details of the Team and the channel. Consider if it is the right place to post the message. Does the message fit the purpose and audience of the Team? Remember that new members added to the Team at a later date will be able to see your message.
A private chat	☐ The chat participants of an existing group. Is it the correct group for your message?
	☐ The recipients' details carefully before creating a new chat group. Avoid confusing one user with another.
Any message	☐ That you've communicated your message clearly and professionally. Never use email or instant messages to gossip or let off steam. Only use emojis, memes, stickers and GIFs with care. If in doubt, sleep on it.

Give your recipients time to respond

Email and instant messages are asynchronous methods of communication. Don't expect an instant response. If you need an immediate response, call. Never send an email followed by an instant message saying 'I've just sent you an email'.

4. THINK BEFORE RESPONDING TO MESSAGES

If you receive a suspicious message, report it

Be cautious about following links and opening message attachments. Never respond to requests for your password or bank details. If in doubt about an email, use the 'Report Message' button in Outlook. If you use platforms that are not supported by the University (e.g. WhatsApp or gmail), you will not be protected by the University's cyber security defences.

If you receive a message that just requires an acknowledgement, give a 👍

A thumbs-up is the equivalent of 'got-it', 'sounds good' or 'OK'. It saves unnecessary 'I acknowledge' or 'noted' responses, and can be done for both email and Teams messages, find out how at Reactions in Microsoft Outlook - Microsoft Support.

If you receive a message that requires a reply, reply

If responding will take less than two minutes, it is most time efficient to respond after reading the message. If responding will take longer and you need to schedule time to

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action the request in the message, schedule time to do so. You may want to use Microsoft To Do or Planner to help you schedule tasks, to find out how see To Do vs. Planner – Microsoft Support. If you can't respond within the requested timescale, reply and say so.

When replying, 'reply'; don't create a new message

When replying to a message, keep the original text as part of the response, and avoid annotating or changing the text of the original message. This ensures the original message and the response are kept together as part of the same record. This may be important later if the messages are needed to evidence our actions and decisions. Guidance on how to 'reply' is at Send a message to a channel in Microsoft Teams - Microsoft Support and Reply to a specific message in chat in Microsoft Teams - Microsoft Support.

If you change the topic of the message thread, move to a new thread

Remember: one topic; one message. If a new topic emerges, create a new message with a new subject line.

Always use your university account for university work

Never automatically forward messages from your university account to another account. Avoid using your Heriot-Watt email address for personal purposes, e.g. as the email address for your amazon account. This compromises the security of your work and information including intellectual property and personal data shared with you. Personal emails are often used by cyber criminals for phishing attacks that could take down our IT systems.

5. MANAGE YOUR MESSAGES

Know your responsibilities

Everyone working on behalf of the University has information management responsibilities. Managing the information you receive, create, and use when carrying out University activities is a core element of those activities. This includes managing your messages. To find out more, read section 5 of the Information Governance and Records Management Policy.

Capture messages in the right place

Email and private chat are communication tools, not file stores. Messages need to be accessible to colleagues who have a business need to see them so that they can continue the work in your absence. Hence, the guidance above: Teams' channels: The place to do the work and Private chat is for ephemeral and transitory use only.

Capture important emails where relevant colleagues can access them, and retention policies can be applied to them. For example, if your team has a shared mailbox, you could create folders for different areas of work and file important emails there. If you don't have a shared mailbox, you could save important emails to the relevant folder on your Workspace Zone.

Avoid creating multiple private chat groups

Before creating a new private chat group, consider the purpose of the group. If it's about the work consider whether there's a Team channel where the conversation should take place and if not, whether to create one. If the purpose of the group is ephemeral and transitory, give the group a name which reflects its transitory purpose, and remember, if a private chat starts getting into substantive work or decision making, it's time to move it to an email or Teams channel post.

Apply retention and deletion policies

All university information should have a defined lifecycle. The lifecycles of most of the University's records are set out in the University's published records retention schedules. The retention schedules don't apply to transitory information. Transitory information has no significant information or evidential value after it has served its primary purpose and can usually be disposed of within six to twelve months.

In Microsoft Teams, posting your message in the correct place will allow automated retention and deletion policies to apply to it. If it's transitory, use private Teams chat. From 1 August 2024 the following retention and deletion policies will be applied to private Teams chat messages. When the policy is reviewed in 2025, University Executive is expecting to significantly reduce the age at which messages sent and received by staff are automatically deleted.

Private Teams chat messages sent and received by…	Will be…
Students	Protected from deletion for six-years, and then automatically deleted
Staff	Automatically deleted when they are over five-years old (with the exception of those sent to or from students which will be retained for six-years)

If it relates to the work of a Team and you've posted the message in a channel within the Team, the message will be deleted in accordance with the retention and deletion policies for the Team.

In Outlook, organise your emails so that you can apply retention labels to emails relating to different activities. Find out how to Assign and view retention policies on email messages - Microsoft Support. From 1 August 2024 the retention labels available in Outlook will be:

Label name	Emails tagged with this label are…	Use for
Ephemera (6 months)	Deleted 6 months after they are created or received	Ephemeral information, e.g. newsletters and circulars, arrangements for events you are attending.
Routine correspondence (18 months)	Deleted 18 months after they are created or received	Routine enquiries or unsolicited feedback and the responses provided. Internal messages

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Label name	Emails tagged with this label are…	Use for
		relating to work planning and scheduling.
Medium-term (7 years)	Deleted 7 years after they are created or received	Most case work records, e.g. complaint handling, FOI requests, etc. and most correspondence relating to financial management.

Any emails that need to be kept for longer than 7 years, should be captured in the relevant record-keeping system, for example the relevant Workspace Zone.

If you use a messaging application which isn't approved for university business, you will need to manage the retention and deletion of your messages manually.

Protect your mobile devices

If you use a mobile device for work communications, including personal devices such as a mobile phone or tablet, the device must be encrypted and protected with a strong passkey.

Don't mix work and private communications

Do not use your university email address for online banking, utilities, shopping or social media because it makes you more vulnerable to phishing. More than 90% of cyber-attacks begin with phishing.

If you use your university email address for personal correspondence with friends and family, please remember that your account and all its contents will be deleted when you leave the University. If you die in service, your heirs and executors will not inherit access to your account as we cannot give third parties access to confidential university information. If you do use your university account for any personal messages, keep them separated from your work messages and delete them regularly. For example, in your email account create a 'Personal' folder, and move all such messages (both received and sent) into this folder.

6. BE CONSIDERATE: HELP YOURSELF AND OTHERS TO WORK EFFECTIVELY

Set your working hours

Let colleagues know your normal working hours by setting your work schedule. Doing so will help them to schedule meetings with you during your working hours and will encourage them to only send you emails during your working hours. Guidance on how to set your working hours is at Learn more about work hours in Outlook - Microsoft Support.

Block time in your diary for lunch so that colleagues know that you're not available to meet. Viva Insights can do this for you automatically, see how to set lunch hours at Use Microsoft Viva Insights in Outlook - Microsoft Support.

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If you use the Outlook and Teams mobile apps, set up 'quiet time' so that you don't get notifications outside your normal working hours. Quiet time in Microsoft Teams for mobile devices - Microsoft Support and How can I learn more about using Quiet Time across devices with Outlook mobile - Microsoft Support.

Use automatic out of office replies

Let colleagues know when you're not at work using automatic 'out of office' replies. As out of office replies now apply to email and Teams messages, say "Thank you for your message" rather than "Thank you for your email". For automatic replies outside the University, include the phrase: "If your message is a freedom of information request or a data subject request, please send it to FOI@hw.ac.uk or dataprotection@hw.ac.uk respectively." Guidance on how to set automatic out of office replies is at Send automatic out of office replies from Outlook for Windows - Microsoft Support.

Configure your notifications to support you to work effectively

Avoid getting distracted by email alerts. Switch off new mail pop-up alerts and icons. Find out how at Best practices for Outlook - Microsoft Support.

Configure your Teams notification settings alongside managing your availability status to ensure you get notified about the right Teams messages, in the right way, at the right time. Guidance is at Manage notification settings - Microsoft Support and Change your status in Microsoft Teams - Microsoft Support.

Box your time

Every time we switch tasks, we make a cognitive shift which reduces our mental resources. To help us to work more effectively, experts recommend 'time-boxing' and 'uni-tasking', i.e. scheduling time to focus on one task at a time, and then sticking to it.

Block time to check your email and messages 2-3 times a day, rather than constantly throughout the day.

Block time to focus without distractions and to prepare for meetings. Viva Insights can do this for you automatically, see Use Microsoft Viva Insights in Outlook - Microsoft Support.

Plan breaks between meetings

Experts tell us that good quality breaks are essential to work at our best. This includes breaks between online meetings.

Rather than scheduling a meeting for 30 or 60 minutes, try 25 or 50 minutes and try starting them 5 or 10 minutes past the hour to allow participants to get a break between back-to-back meetings. Guidance on how to do this automatically is at Make all your events shorter automatically - Microsoft Support.

Respect work life balance

As members of a global University that supports flexible working we may be sending messages to colleagues outside their working hours. Be considerate.

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Respect the Teams 'availability status' of colleagues. If it says 'do not disturb' or 'busy', don't call them and never expect an immediate response to a chat message.

Use Viva Insights 'schedule send suggestions' to delay delivery on emails to avoid your recipient seeing the email outside their normal working hours, unless you know they're waiting for it. Guidance is at [Schedule send in Outlook - Microsoft Support](#). You may also want to add the following to your email signature:

> *Heriot-Watt is a global university and we work flexibly. As a result, my working hours may not be yours. I do not expect a response or action outside your working hours.*

Be positive

Use every communication to move business forward, never to apportion blame, make a point at someone else's expense or cover your own back.

Consider your language and tone to avoid causing possible hurt or offence to others. For example, capital letters are often interpreted as shouting.

Never send a message when you're angry or upset. Before you press send: sleep on it. Better still, meet online or face-to-face and have a conversation to resolve the issue.

Help colleagues to recognise you

Review and update your profile. Consider including a profile picture and your pronouns (both are optional). Guidance on how to update your profile information is at [Profile cards in Microsoft 365 - Microsoft Support](#).

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APPENDIX 2: EQUALITY AND DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Responsibility for this assessment:	Anne Grzybowski Records Manager Information Governance Division Governance and Legal Services Telephone: 0131 451 4140 Email: InfoGov@hw.ac.uk
Date of assessment:	March 2024
Date for future review of policy/function:	When the Policy is next reviewed, which is five years from the date of approval or more frequently if required
Policy or process being assessed:	Email and Messaging Policy
New or existing policy?	This assessment relates to the updates to an existing policy. This is the first time an equality impact assessment has been carried out for this policy

THE POLICY

1   Briefly describe the aims, objectives, and purpose of the policy, and any associated objectives of the policy.
The Policy sets out the University's expectations for how employees and other people working for or on behalf of the University Group should use email and other electronic communications, such as instant messaging or 'chat' in Teams. In doing so, the Policy: • Recognises that any communications sent or received in the course of our work are subject to the same legal requirements that govern any other University information • Supports the University in managing information and records produced in the form of email and electronic messages • Supports the University to be accountable for, and transparent about, its activities, by applying information governance principles to the management of email and electronic messages
2   Does the policy impact people?

Yes. Emails and electronic messages are created, received, and used by people. The format, design, and management of those messages can impact the extent to which they are accessible to different equality groups. Most contain information which identifies the sender and recipient, some will contain information about third-parties. Those individuals are data subjects and have rights in relation to the information the University holds about them.

The information we create and retain (or do not create and retain) provides the basis for the University's decision-making and its corporate memory.

3	Who is intended to benefit from the policy and in what way?
	The Policy is intended to benefit University staff by setting expectations and good prractice for how we message one another. The good practice guidance is intended to help us to work more efficiently and considerately.
4	Is any data available about the policy, e.g. feedback from users?
	Feedback on the revised policy and guidance is being sought from members of the Optimising M365 Steering Group, the Global Information Governance and Data Protection Committee, [insert other groups as appropriate].
5	What outcomes are wanted from this policy?
	The amendments to this policy are intended to manage compliance, reputation, information, and sustainability risks. The most significant amendments relate to the retention and deletion of messages and to the provision of guidance relating to the management of instant messages. Keeping messages longer than necessary increases our carbon footprint unnecessarily, risks non-compliance with data protection laws. At the same time, without managing messages we risk losing messages that are required for business, legal or regulatory purposes when a member of staff leaves and their account is deleted.
6	What factors/forces could contribute/detract from the outcomes?
	Insufficient awareness raising to help staff understand the changes.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

7	The Equality Act 2010 includes a requirement to give 'due regard' to the public sector equality duty (PSED) in all functions. There is a specific duty to assess the impact of proposed new or revised policies and practices against three needs of the general duty. Use this section to outline relevant issues.	
	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation	This Policy and the accompanying guidance is specifically intended to eliminate harassment and victimisation using email and electronic messages. The Policy emphasises the importance of communicating with courtesy and respect.
	Advance equality of opportunity between people of different groups	Taking account of the needs of different equality groups at record creation stage and creating effective records consistently across the University, will help to meet the needs of different equality groups.
	Foster good relations between people of different groups	The Policy aligns with the University's strategic goal "Building Flourishing Communities" and the University's values to belong and collaborate. Transparent and accountable record-keeping is a fundamental building block to build flourishing communities which foster good relations between people of different groups.
8	Do you have any concerns that the policy could have a differential impact on any of the Protected Characteristic groups? Detail any relevant information.	
	It may be beneficial to give particular consideration to the Protected Characteristic groups in your impact assessment. The Protected Characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010 are: Age, Disability, Race, Religion and Belief (including no belief), Sex, Sexual Orientation, Pregnancy and Maternity, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership.	

The Policy applies to everyone working on behalf of the university, including employees, casual workers, contractors, agents, and those with an honorary or voluntary role, whenever they are carrying out work for the University that involves (or ought to involve) the creation, receipt, or use of email and electronic messages. The people to whom the Policy applies include people with protected characteristics.

Without this Policy and its implementation, it is possible that information management practices could have a differential impact on

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- People with disabilities. Some people use assistive technologies to create and use information. Some information formats and formatting are less accessible to some people. Information which lacks metadata, or which applies metadata inconsistently is less accessible to some people.

- Neurodiverse learners. Much of the guidance accompanying this Policy is intended to support neurodiverse ways of working. For example the emphasis on the importance of clear, unambiguous written communication, structured in a "what, by when, and why" basis, using plain English.

- People of different ages. People of different generations may have different approaches and expectations in relation to email and messaging, which tools to use for what, and how to use them. This Policy and accompanying guidance is intended to set expectations for how the University uses these tools so that we can work together without misunderstandings.

We recognise that there may be a differential impact on equality groups whose first language is not English, as most university messages are in English. We also recognise that English is the primary language in which the University operates. These groups may find that idioms and culturally specific language are less accessible. This impact can be mitigated through the accompanying guidance that reminds colleagues to avoid ambiguity and use language that is appropriate to the audience.

We do not expect this Policy to have a specific differential impact on sex, race, gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership.

9	What are the risks associated with the policy in relation to differential impact?
	No differential impacts are expected
10	Could the differential impact identified in 6-11 amount to there being the potential for adverse impact in this policy? If no, outline why and go to question 12.
	No.
11	Can this adverse impact be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group? Or any other reason.
	N/A

12	Demonstrate how you have involved stakeholders in the equality impact assessment.
	The revised Policy and Guidance were presented for feedback to the Optimising M365 Steering Group and the Information Services and Information Governance Information Security Working Group during February and March. At the end of March, an article in Newsbeat - [Let's talk about Teams Chat (sharepoint.com)](sharepoint.com) – encouraged colleagues to share their views in relation to proposals to delete private Teams Chat. The conversations prompted by that article – many of which are captured at [Viva Engage - Teams-Chat-Deletion-Have-Your-Say (cloud.microsoft)](cloud.microsoft) - have informed the review. On 9 May 2024, the revised Policy and Guidance were presented for consideration and endorsement by the Global Information Goverannce and Data Protection Committee. On 12 June, the Policy and Guidance were presented to the Joint HR and Trade Union Working Group for feedback.

DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT: SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

13	Does implementation of the policy or procedure necessitate processing:	
	Information about people who can be identified from that information or in combination with other information ('personal data')	Yes. Emails and messages are sent and received by individuals. Their content may also contain information about third parties.
	Personal data about: racial or ethnic origin; political opinions; religious of philosophical beliefs; trade union membership; physical or mental health; sex life or sexual orientation; proven or alleged offences, including criminal convictions ('special category personal data')	Yes. The Policy applies to emails and messages that contain special category personal data.
	Confidential information that is not personal data	Yes. This Policy applies to emails and messages that contain confidential information.
14	Does implementation of the policy or procedure involve:	

Transfers of personal data outside the UK to organisations that are not members of the Heriot-Watt University Group?	Emails and electronic messages are already sent outside the UK and to organisations that are not members of the Heriot-Watt University Group. This Policy supports compliance with the Data Protection Policy by hightlighting data protection considerations which specifically apply to email and electronic messages.
Collecting any new categories of personal data about individuals that we don't already collect about them?	The expansion of the use of instant messaging during the Covid-19 pandemic led to an increase in the number and type of messages sent, replacing many verbal interactions. This Policy supports compliance with the Data Protection Policy by hightlighting data protection considerations which specifically apply to email and electronic messages.
A change to the nature, scope, context, or purpose of our processing and/or the use of information about individuals	No.
Compelling individuals to provide personal data about themselves that is not strictly necessary?	No.
Disclosing personal data or other confidential information about individuals to people or organisations who have not previously had routine access to it?	No.
Contacting individuals in ways that they may find intrusive?	No.
Sharing personal data about individuals without their consent where there isn't a statutory reason to do so?	No. The Policy supports compliance with the Data Protection Policy which governs the sharing of personal data.

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A high risk to individuals which would make a data protection impact assessment mandatory?	No. The Policy supports compliance with the Data Protection Policy.