



## Student Communication Policy

The University of Aberdeen is committed to ensuring all students benefit from an excellent student experience and feel part of a supportive community throughout their studies and beyond.

As the number of communication tools continues to increase, so does the challenge to effectively monitor and manage how we effectively communicate with students. This policy will provide clear guidance to all internal stakeholders enabling us to ensure the right messages are being communicated at the right time and in the right way to students.

This policy has been developed in consultation with both staff and students and provides a clear articulation of the institution's expectations around student communication. It outlines the main channels available to communicate with students and how the Communication Champions, who have been identified in each School/section, will assist in enforcing the policy.

For the purposes of this document:

**Feedback** refers to interactions with students regarding their student experience as opposed to **Academic feedback** on assessment.

**Student support services** refers to any section of the University providing a service to students – Career Services, SLS, Infohub, Student Support, Library, Finance, Registry, Accommodation, IT Service Desk.

### The benefits of co-ordinated communication

- reduction of “noise” making students more likely to engage with individual pieces of communication;
- through fostering a culture of two way communication and feedback, students will feel included, supported, valued and listened to;
- the University can be more supportive to and respond more effectively to the student voice;
- positive impact on retention;
- assist students to maximise the opportunities available to them at University;
- measure attitudinal and behavioural change
- create a community of emotionally connected students, who go on to become ambassadors as alumni for the institution;
- build trust and respect amongst the student body through transparent communication

### 1. Principles

The guiding principles of this policy are to:

- Align with the University's people values to create a respectful and inclusive community, built on trust and integrity
- Be student focused, deliver co-ordinated, consistent and relevant communication which enhances the student experience;
- Develop timely and impactful communications to maximise engagement and underpin core institutional goals;
- Set expectations for staff and students on how they should expect to be communicated with;

- Provide clarity for staff on institutional communication procedures and how to maximise the effectiveness and reach of messages
- Provide clear and easy access for students to essential, useful and engaging information in the most appropriate and effective format i.e. University email, Student Hub, VLE, social media, printed material;
- Be open and transparent with students in all communication;
- Provide effective two way channels of communication to encourage student feedback;
- Comply with data protection legislation in the use of student personal data;
- Communicate effectively with students during a serious incident.

## 2. Message categories

The University must comply fully with data protection legislation in the use of students' personal data. We are required to advise students explicitly how we will use their contact details (home and term address, email address and mobile phone number) and to use them **only** for those purposes.

Categories of messages are outlined below, along with those responsible for each category when communicating with students:

### **Mass communication (to all students or large groups – 80% +)**

This includes all communication to large groups or to all students and can cover subjects such as promoting services to support students, co-curricular activities and promoting campaigns such as InForm or CluedUp. It can also be used to provide official information relating to tuition fees, accommodation or regulation changes. Such messages are sent by **Student Experience**.

### **Event communication**

Student facing events are organised by various Schools and sections across the University and AUSA. The Student event communication guidelines provide an overview of the co-ordinated approach to promote these to gain maximum publicity and impact. Such messages are sent by **Student Experience**.

### **Operational communication**

This includes operational messages such as room changes, timetable changes, deadlines – anything related to the students' learning experience and working environment. Such messages are sent by **Schools, Registry or DDIS**.

### **Learning and teaching communication**

This includes all formal or informal communication between teaching staff and students, on an individual basis or in groups related to their learning and teaching experience. Such messages are sent by **Schools, Academic staff, Registry and Student Learning Services**.

### **Monitoring Communication**

The University operates a [monitoring system](#) throughout the academic year to identify students who may be experiencing difficulties with their studies and to ensure that students remain on track for their degree and satisfy the minimum attendance requirements. Such messages are sent by **Registry, Schools and Academic staff**.

### **Major incident communication**

This includes all communication to students related to a major incident. Such messages are sent by **Communications**.

## Surveys

This includes a number of core surveys i.e. NSS, JISC, ASES and adhoc surveys (which have been approved by the Student Survey Working Group) that students will be asked to participate in. **Requests to participate will be sent by the survey facilitator in consultation with Student Experience.**

## Specific services communication

Some student support services may need to contact students individually, for example to respond to queries or to remind students of appointment dates and times via email or text. **Such messages are sent by the support services.**

## 3. Responsibilities

### ***The Student Experience team is responsible for:***

- Management of all mass communication through central channels;
- Management of communication with large groups of students on behalf of Schools, sections and support services on non-academic related matters;
- Management of all event communication with students;
- Maintenance of this policy and advice on its implementation;
- Liaising with Communication Champions;
- Providing advice and guidance to staff on communicating effectively with students;
- Articulating to students how they should expect to be communicated with;
- Where required, segmenting data to ensure mass communication is tailored to specific student groups;
- Ensuring this policy aligns to and supports other institutional policies and projects such as social media, student events and Welcome Week/Induction and Engage the world;
- Co-ordination of a student experience feedback framework: ***Inform – Feedback for your Future.***

### ***Communications are responsible for***

- Serious incident communication;
- Corporate communication.

### **Student & Academic Services are responsible for:**

- Managing student data through the Student Records System;
- Providing advice, guidance and training to staff on effectively using the VLE;
- Operational communications relating to monitoring and progression;

### **Schools' administrative staff are responsible for:**

- Learning and teaching communication with their students;
- Operational communication related to students' working environment and the administration of their courses and study programme through induction and day to day interactions;
- Help to inform students of how they will be communicated with, primarily in relation to what information will be provided via the Student Hub and VLE.

### **Academic staff are responsible for:**

- Course and study programme specific learning and teaching communication with their students;
- Utilising the VLE as outlined in the [guidelines](#);

- Utilising the appropriate method of communication as outlined in this policy;
- Providing appropriate academic feedback to students;
- Through induction and day to day interactions, help to inform students of how they will be communicated with, primarily in relation to what information will be provided via the Student Hub and VLE.
- **Student support services are responsible for:**
- Reacting to and communicating with students on an individual basis who are engaged with or using their service.

#### **Students are responsible for:**

- Ensuring they check primary channels of communication, at least weekly and respond in a timely manner where necessary;
- Maintaining their up-to-date personal details on the Student Hub;
- Engaging in learning and teaching communications in a timely manner.

#### **Students are encouraged to:**

- engage with secondary channels of communication such as social media and the student ezine;
- inform the University if messages or information are not reaching them in a satisfactory manner by proactively participating in feedback opportunities.

## **4. Communication channels**

With a vast array of communication channels available to students, this section summarises the primary and secondary channels available to communicate to and with students.

### **4.1 Primary channels**

#### **Email**

All students have a University email account. When using email, all University-related correspondence with students should be sent to their University email account (unless this is unavailable) only from a University email account, using the data held in the Student Record System. Staff are not to collect and/or use other personal email accounts for ordinary correspondence.

***University staff should, wherever possible use University student email addresses to engage in all correspondence.***

The principle of “less is more” should be adopted in relation to email communication. In a recent survey our students indicated that they like to receive information by email but currently they receive too many. Before sending an email, consider the nature of the message and whether it could be sent via another channel, please refer to table 1 and consult with a Communication Champion.

The following mass segments have been created to help ensure students receive the most relevant communication: UG, PG, Transnational, Online. Additional segmentation, by year or cohort will be utilised to support core institutional projects i.e. New Student Survey, Graduation or NSS communications.

#### **Student Hub**

The Student Hub is the landing page for students, providing access to essential information and services relating to their university experience. Students can view and update personal information,

view their teaching timetable, exam results, past grades, study programme details, and see news items from around the University. Students have the ability to customise their preferences.

Students are encouraged to use the Student Hub as the first port of call for accessing information. It also contains links to other resources that students use regularly – email, MyTimetable, VLE, MyCurriculum, Toolkit, CluedUp, InForm and Personal Tutoring. The Student Hub can be used to promote timely and important information such as student support services, graduation deadlines, elections or course selection (replacing Message of the Day).

### **Virtual Learning Environment**

MyAberdeen is the University's main virtual learning environment. This is where students will find learning materials and resources associated with their courses, engage in formative activities and summative assessments, access provisional grades and online feedback for course work, and receive announcements. In addition, through organisations in MyAberdeen, students have access to learning resources such as ACHIEVE, School-level information relating to their academic studies and to their Personal Tutor. MyAberdeen can be accessed directly or through the Student Hub. Students receive a daily digest of all course and organisation announcements from the day before, and any additional notifications that they have subscribed to in MyAberdeen. Only if a message is urgent i.e. change of room, cancellation of lecture, should it be sent as a direct email (through MyAberdeen). Students should be encouraged to manage their preferences in MyAberdeen, download the app and to proactively visit MyAberdeen regularly for course related information.

Medicine, Dentistry and Physician Associate students will use MyMBChB, MyBDS and MyPA for a similar purpose.

### **Web**

The [Current Student webpages](#) (currently Infohub but due to change) are the central repository of information for all current students of the University of Aberdeen.

### **Ezine**

The Student ezine will be issued fortnightly. It provides a platform to communicate co-curricular information, news and information to students. Staff and students are encouraged to submit content ideas (in accordance with the ezine policy). E-zines are archived [here](#) for reference.

## **4.2 Secondary channels**

### **Social media**

In line with the University's social media strategy, Student Experience will maintain the University's current student social media channels:

#### ***Facebook/Twitter***

@StudentLifeUOA is promoted to students as the social media platform for current students at the University of Aberdeen, promoting opportunities for students to engage in a diverse and fulfilling student experience. The page features student and institutional success stories, co-curricular opportunities, advice, news and events. It also includes other information such as Toolkit updates and the various offers available from on campus catering.

### **Instagram**

Utilise the University main account to engage with current students, particularly around specific campaigns such as Graduations, student success and promoting student life.

In addition to these primary social media platforms, Student Experience will continue to feed relevant information to other University platforms i.e. Twitter and Webchat.

Schools are encouraged to continue feeding relevant information to students through their own social media channels however, they should remind students that @studentlife is the main social media platform for current students.

### **Plasma screens**

There are many plasma screens across the campus that are currently managed jointly by Internal Communications and individual Schools and sections. The screens can be used to promote events, good news stories and co-curricular opportunities.

### **Notice boards**

There are many notice boards across the campus displaying information for students. Staff with responsibility for the maintenance of notice boards in their School or section should ensure that information is advertised in a timely manner and, importantly, is removed when out of date.

In addition, Student Experience have notice boards in strategic locations around campus and will use these to help Schools, sections and services disseminate information about events and initiatives to students.

### **Printed material**

Such as posters, leaflets and flyers. Student Experience will create a monthly event poster to promote student facing events and initiatives, displaying them on social media and in designated sites across campus.

### **Other methods of Communication**

The Student Experience team will continue to identify new and innovative ways of communicating with students to help support them in having a fulfilling student experience.

## **5. Professionalism in communication**

In all communications, staff are reminded of their responsibility to serve the interests of the University and ensure appropriate content at all times. Staff should ensure appropriate response times are adhered to when communicating with students. A fair judgement should be made regarding the nature of the issue at hand, however all communication requiring a response should be actioned within five working days. During absence or when staff will not be able to respond in a reasonable time, staff should provide an autoreply to their emails with details of an alternative contact.

## **6. Inform – Feedback for your future**

To ensure we are delivering the best possible student experience, it is crucial that we obtain more detailed and regular feedback from students about the Aberdeen experience, which we can use to monitor, develop, shape and improve the student experience at the University of Aberdeen. The [Student Feedback framework](#) sets out the formal and informal mechanisms for obtaining student feedback under the banner of [InForm](#). It identifies how the University will articulate to students what has happened to their feedback. In addition we will continue to promote to students and staff the benefits of providing and making use of feedback. There are numerous mechanisms to allow

formal and informal feedback from students, these are detailed in the Student Feedback framework and on the InForm website: [www.abdn.ac.uk/inform](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/inform)

### **7. Complaint handling**

The University adheres to the [Student Appeals and Complaint handling procedures](#), providing frameworks through which students of the University can formalise any concerns they may have about aspects of their student experience.

### **8. Communication Champions**

Each School or section has identified a Communication Champion who is responsible for:

- providing advice on adhering to this policy;
- liaising with Student Experience; assisting with dissemination of relevant information to students via the correct communication media.

### **9. Managing Expectations**

This policy and its implications will be communicated to staff and students using a variety of mechanisms including Staff Net and the Communicating with you web page.

### **10. IT Security**

Just like any other large organisation, the University is under constant attack from cyber criminals and the threat to the institution, and to you, is very real.

We deploy a wide range of technical measures to protect you while working on University systems and networks; but technology alone is not enough to protect us. In the end, it's down to people. And **you** are our best line of defence.

Because cyber attacks come in many forms and are constantly evolving, it's important that you keep up to date and that you know what to look out for. Further information and training is available on staffnet.

### **11. Further information**

The Student Experience team is continually reviewing practices and making improvements across the institution in a range of areas to help improve the student experience. Implementation of a clear student communication policy is a key project and we encourage you to use the team to help promote and communicate your initiatives.

Do not hesitate to contact us at [studentlife@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:studentlife@abdn.ac.uk) to discuss your requirements.

Message Category	Example	Responsibility	Primary channel					Secondary channel				
			Email	Student Hub	MyAberdeen (including email/announcements)	MyTimetable	Web	Ezine	Social media	Noticeboards	Print Material	Plasmas
Mass Communication	Campaigns, Student Services, opportunities	Student Experience	Coordinate with SE	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	Coordinate with SE	YES
Event Communication	IC events, Health and Wellbeing	Student Experience	Coordinate with SE	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	Coordinate with SE	YES
Operational Communication	Deadlines, Room Changes	Schools	Yes	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Learning and Teaching Communication	Coursework, advice,	Schools	Coordinate with SE	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Monitoring Communication	C6, C7	Academic Services	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Major Incident Communication	Extreme weather, Terrorist attack	Communications	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Surveys	NSS, JISC, ASES	Survey Facilitator	Coordinate with SE	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Yes – Recommended Channel

No – Not recommend for this message