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## ELECTRONIC MAIL (EMAIL) FOR OFFICIAL CORRESPONDENCE WITH STUDENTS – OPERATING GUIDELINES

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### 1. Purpose of guidelines

The purpose of these guidelines is to help staff interpret and apply the University Policy on the Use of Electronic Mail (Email) for Official Correspondence with Students [add link to policy]. The guidelines are explanatory and advisory rather than prescriptive. They will be updated frequently to reflect evolving practice.

### 2. Policy context

La Trobe University has approved the Policy on the Use of Electronic Mail (Email) for Official Correspondence with Students which establishes email sent and received through the University's email system as the primary medium for formal communications with students. All students are assigned a University email account when they enrol for courses or units (subjects). University officers will address official correspondence to that account.

Official University correspondence sent by email is subject to the same standards of propriety and the same privacy and record retention requirements as any other official University communications. In particular, the Policy on the Use of Electronic Mail (Email) for Official Correspondence with Students:

- is consistent with the provisions of Commonwealth and State laws on electronic transactions;
- operates under the Statutes and Regulations of the University, and specifically [Statute 37](#) and [Regulation 37.1 - Use of University Computer Facilities](#);
- should be read and interpreted as part of the University's suite of Information and Communication Technology policies;
- is complemented by the University Equity and Access policies, which provide specific protections;
- is subject to the University's published codes of conduct for both students and staff.

In interpreting and applying any policy, staff should be guided by the core values of the University. These are embedded in the [La Trobe University Act 1964](#) and taken up in the current University [Strategic Plan](#).

### 3. Responsibilities

In general, all students, and all officers of the University who send official correspondence to students, are responsible for knowing about the policy and for complying with it. Official emails to students, and the responses to those emails, may become part of the students' official record and be subject to relevant legislation such as the [Public Records Act](#), the [Privacy Act](#) and the [Freedom of Information Act](#).

#### 3.1. Staff

<i>Responsible area</i>	<i>Particular responsibilities</i>
All areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include in outgoing emails appropriate and adequate information to identify the email as an official University communication.</li> <li>• Keep copies or transaction records of official emails in accordance with relevant policies and practices.</li> <li>• Notify students how email will be used for official correspondence and advise of any special expectations or requirements (for example, to check email more frequently at certain key times).</li> </ul>
Academic Services Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advise ICT Services when students become eligible or ineligible for a University email account.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform students about email policy.</li> <li>• Assess and authorise applications to send broadcast emails to all students.</li> </ul>
Academic Services Division –Policy Unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advise on interpretation and application of policy.</li> <li>• Collect feedback and coordinate responses.</li> <li>• Deal with general complaints about the policy.</li> <li>• Arrange scheduled policy reviews.</li> </ul>
Equality and Diversity Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess applications for special arrangements on equity and access grounds.</li> <li>• Advise staff on appropriate arrangements in individual cases.</li> </ul>
Heads – Academic and Administrative Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess and authorise applications to send broadcast emails to cohorts of students (see section 4.1).</li> </ul>
<b>Information and Communications Technology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assign and register University email accounts.</li> <li>• Maintain the University email system.</li> <li>• Respond to queries or complaints about the operation of the University email system.</li> </ul>

### 3.2. Students

The main responsibilities of students are to:

- activate their University email account and use it in accordance with the relevant policies;
- check their email regularly and at any specific times that the University may direct;
- contact the University promptly if they believe they need any of the special arrangements allowed under the policy; and, importantly,
- accept full responsibility for email that they redirect, or request the University to redirect, to an email account other than their official University account (see section 7.2). *Redirecting email does not absolve a student from responsibilities associated with official University correspondence.*

### 3.3. Expectations for frequency of checking email

Many official communications are time critical: they require or invite action within a specific period of time. Both staff and students need to check their email on a frequent and regular basis.

The policy suggests that email, which includes Learning Management System (LMS - formerly WebCT) email, be checked at least twice weekly. More frequent checking may be required (and most staff will check their email far more often, at least once daily). There is nothing in the policy to prevent staff from setting more stringent requirements, as appropriate to the circumstances. For example:

- staff communicating with students enrolled in academic units (subjects) may want the students to check their email daily throughout the unit, or at certain points during the unit.
- staff communicating with students 'at risk' of failing to meet academic progress requirements may counsel them to check their email daily over the weeks following the release of examination results.

Expectations of this kind should be communicated to students ahead of time (e.g. written into unit (subject) outlines, included in information leaflets, published on relevant web pages).

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### 3.4. Expectations for timely response to email

There is an expectation that email will be responded to in a timely manner, but 'timely' is relative to the significance and urgency of the subject matter. It is not assumed that email will be responded to immediately: it is part of an individual's entire workload and must be prioritised, like any other part of the workload. A response time between 24 and 72 hours is reasonable in most cases.

### 3.5. Advice of absence

Staff who will be on extended on annual, or who will be unable to respond to email for a period of time for other reasons, should post a message on their Learning Management System (LMS) and/or office email account.

## 4. Guidance on applying the policy

In recommending the policy to Academic Board, the Academic Committee put on record that correspondence covered by the policy should occur *only* through the University email accounts except as provided by the policy. That is:

- where the correspondence must be sent in a particular form to comply with a relevant legal requirement, Statute, Regulation, or University instruction;
- where the correspondence is 'important' (see section 4.3), in which case it must be sent by postal mail as well as by email;
- where a student negotiates an alternative arrangement on equity or access grounds (see section 4.5).

Other exceptional circumstances will arise from time to time and will require the exercise of professional judgment. Obviously the policy does not preclude the use of communication modes other than email when appropriate.

### 4.1. Application to broadcast (bulk) emails

Broadcast emails are mass emails intended for all students or for groups of students who share similar enrolment status, such as (but not limited to) membership of a certain campus, faculty, school or course. Because their ability to reach large numbers of students increases the University's risk exposure, broadcast emails are subject to a stricter set of guidelines. The guidelines are set out in full the Procedure for Authorising Email Broadcasts to Students. The procedure provides for any member of the University to request a broadcast email; however, the request must be approved by an appropriate authority, guided by criteria described in the procedure.

### 4.2. Application to correspondence sent or generated through system-specific email tools

Some University systems and applications – notably the Student Information System (STUSIS) and the web-based learning and teaching system (Learning Management System (LMS)) – have in-built email tools. Strictly speaking, these email tools are not part of 'the University email system'. They are, however, used by University staff to send or generate official correspondence to student email accounts: for example, notification of results and notification of 'enrolment rule breaches' that invalidate unit (subject) choices. Thus the principles of the policy apply to this correspondence as far as practicable; and staff who plan to use email in their units (subjects) must communicate their intentions and expectations to all affected students.

### 4.3. Application to email to or from generic University addresses (eg [policy@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:policy@latrobe.edu.au))

Emails from a generic address such as 'policy@latrobe.edu.au' are acceptable. In situations where several staff members are equally able to deal with particular types of business, a generic address may actually be preferable.

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Senders need to be aware that a message sent from a generic address will incorporate a system-generated warning along these lines: 'This message comes from an unattended mailbox. Please do not reply.' Thus it is essential to include in the message full details of how the receivers can send their response. The detail may be, for example, a link to a web address.

System-generated messages must be set up to include any information that the University requires or recommends for official correspondence. In particular:

- the University's CRICOS provider number *must* be included in any official correspondence that *may* go to international students, whether or not the correspondence specifically targets international students;
- official correspondence should include a standard privacy statement.

See section 8 for more details.

#### **4.4. Correspondence not covered by the policy**

##### ***Inconsequential correspondence***

The policy does not cover correspondence which has minimal or no connection to a student's rights or responsibilities within the University, or within an academic course or unit (subject) of the University. A useful test is whether the communication is one that a student would reasonably expect to receive from the University.

##### ***Promotional correspondence***

The policy does not cover correspondence whose primary purpose is to advertise or promote programs or services. Promotional messages are subject to anti-spam legislation and must be used with extreme care. The criteria in the Procedure for Authorising Broadcast Emails to Students (see section 4.1) are useful for evaluating *any* proposed message for appropriateness.

### **5. Guidance on interpreting key terms**

#### **5.1. 'Official' correspondence**

The policy covers correspondence that students *need* to receive or send *in order to meet their obligations or exercise their rights in relation to the University*. This implies that the correspondence should:

- be related to the original purpose of providing students with email accounts; and
- be directed to specific, targeted student audiences (whether individual students or groups of students).

Official correspondence will have a clear academic or administrative purpose. Often it will expect, require or invite an action: for example, to re-enrol in a course, arrange a clinical placement, or make an appointment to appear before an Academic Progress Committee. It is most likely to be in connection with:

- requirements for courses or units (subjects) that students are undertaking;
- core student administration processes, such as re-enrolment or graduation;
- University services and facilities that are part of the academic infrastructure, such as the Library, Student IT Support, or Language and Academic Skills units.

The 'Procedure for Authorising Email Broadcasts to Students', which operates under the policy, contains additional guidance (see section 4.1).

#### **5.2. 'Important' correspondence**

All official correspondence has some importance or it would not be sent. 'Important' should be interpreted quite narrowly here, however, to limit the risk of 'information overload and to help reduce the University's traditional reliance on postal mail, which is comparatively expensive and slow.

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'Important' correspondence generally conveys information about a University or Government decision that is likely to impact significantly on a student's ability or eligibility to commence, complete or continue in a course or in a component of a course. The impact may be either positive or negative.

A few examples of correspondence that would be considered 'important' are:

- correspondence reporting a University decision against which a student has a right to appeal formally;
- correspondence reporting a decision or offer which is of substantial financial consequence to the student (e.g. the award of an equity scholarship);
- correspondence advising an international student that the University has reported him or her to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) for violating a visa condition.

The policy assumes that email will be used judiciously. Both students and staff may miss or ignore messages if they receive too many, or if the content is of little value to them.

### 5.3. 'Assumed' delivery

The policy deems email sent from one authorised account on the University email system to another account on the University email system to have been delivered *unless* the system returns an error message to the contrary. This position is supported by law. However, alternative positions may sometimes be appropriate under special provisions in section 4.

The absence of an error message does not prove that an email communication has been received, opened or read by the addressee (just as the absence of an envelope 'returned to sender' does not prove postal mail has been received, opened or read). Any complaints or disputes involving questions of delivery should be dealt with through normal University processes (see section 10).

Where appropriate, students can be encouraged to set up an 'out of office' response when they are not able to receive email. They should be cautioned, however, that this does not absolve them of the responsibilities in section 3.2.

## 6. Guidance on provisions for special arrangements for official correspondence

### 6.1. Where required for legal, regulatory or policy reasons

Where a Commonwealth or State law or a Regulation of the University prescribes the manner in which certain correspondence must be sent, that prescription takes precedence over the provisions of this policy.

Where the University is delivering a program in a jurisdiction other than Victoria (i.e. in another state or in a country other than Australia), the laws of that jurisdiction must be taken into account.

Where the University is co-delivering a program with another institution, the relevant policy of that institution must be taken into account. Protocols for communicating with students should be included in delivery agreements.

### 6.2. Where sought for equity or access reasons

The University promotes full and equal participation of all students and staff and has equity and access policies that provide a range of protections. The University will accommodate students who, for legitimate equity or access reasons, have special requirements for the receipt or transmission of official correspondence. Individualised arrangements may need to be negotiated, for example, for people who permanently or temporarily:

- have a visual impairment;
- have another physical impairment that impedes their ability to manipulate equipment; or
- live or study in a remote area.

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The Equality and Diversity Centre can provide advice on appropriate adjustments or alternatives. Even where special arrangements are not required, staff can make life easier for *all* email recipients by following a few principles of good practice (see also section 8):

- Send all official correspondence as plain text unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise. This makes it easier for mail recipients to adjust how the document appears (or sounds) to them, using one of the many access tools available.
- Keep messages short and clear.
- Divide complex messages into short paragraphs with informative headings.
- Order content from most important to least important.
- Avoid attachments – especially .pdf files, which screen readers find difficult to interpret. Rather than attachments, it would be preferable to have non-plain text material hosted on a website with a link to the material included in the plain text email. If an attachment must be included, make it accessible in an appropriate Microsoft Office application (Word, Excel or PowerPoint).

### **6.3. Where desirable for practical reasons**

Responses to official communications may arrive from non-University accounts without prior authorisation. Staff members may accept these at their discretion, as long as the sender has provided enough information to enable the University to contact them and to confirm their identity within reasonable doubt. This information must include, as a minimum, their full name, their student number, and their La Trobe email address.

Occasionally students are unable to receive email due to special circumstances documented within the University: for example, approved periods of deferment or intermission, or travel in association with a case for special consideration. Each case can be considered on its merits and exceptions allowed where appropriate, applying similar principles to 6.2 above. However, students are responsible for negotiating their arrangements with the appropriate University officer.

### **6.4. Where requested on basis of limited computer literacy**

The University expects all its students to have, or to develop, the level of computer literacy appropriate to their field and level of study. ‘Inadequate computer literacy’ normally would not be grounds for special arrangements, unless negotiated on a very short-term basis pending a student’s completion of appropriate training. Students in need of such training should contact the Information and Communication Technology group for suggestions.

## **7. Guidance on technical and security considerations**

***Forwarding University email to a personal (non-La Trobe account) is done at a student’s own risk.***

Students are responsible for reading and (as appropriate) acting on all official correspondence sent to them via their University-assigned email account. For reasons of security and control, they are not encouraged to forward messages sent to their La Trobe account to a personal (non-La Trobe) account. However, if they choose to do so, they do so at their own risk. The University cannot accept any responsibility for the handling of email by external providers. Redirecting email does not absolve a student from the student responsibilities outlined in this policy.

***Email sent from a personal (non-La Trobe account) requires adequate identification.***

The University cannot validate that an email communication is from the person who ostensibly sent it unless it comes from a valid @latrobe.edu.au address. When emailing the University from an unofficial email account, students should include their full name and @latrobe.edu.au address in the message body. If they do not, they may be asked to resend the communication from their La Trobe account.

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***'Spam' filters can cause 'lost' email.***

Many people use desktop spam filters, or subscribe to an email service that implements filters. Students who wish to forward University email to a personal email account should check how their system handles spam. It is generally best not to identify *any* messages coming from '@latrobe.edu.au' addresses as 'junk' or 'spam': depending on the particular Internet service provider, that could result in non-delivery of *all* email from La Trobe. Students are responsible for making sure they are receiving official correspondence from the University and should make appropriate investigations if communications they expect to receive do not arrive.

***Even 'University' emails can be fake!***

It is possible to receive spam or virus-infected messages with a valid @latrobe.edu.au address that has been forged or spoofed. Students should evaluate the contents of every email communication from La Trobe University before taking any irrevocable action. If the contents of a message seem odd or unusual, students should contact the ostensible sender to confirm that the message is legitimate.

***Inboxes must be managed.***

Students must manage their University email account to minimise the risk of a full inbox, which would cause incoming mail to 'bounce'.

***Important official correspondence can be kept separate from other emails.***

Students may want to create an email folder specifically to hold *official* University correspondence and to set rules that automatically direct messages from specific @latrobe.edu.au addresses into that folder. This method can be used to separate correspondence that is likely to be important and to require action from correspondence related to, say, clubs or sporting teams.

**8. Guidance on 'best practice' email communication**

***Include information that the University requires or recommends for official correspondence***

- The University's CRICOS provider number *must* be included in any official correspondence that *may* go to international students, whether or not the correspondence specifically targets international students. **This is a legal requirement.** Use this standard wording:  
La Trobe University is a registered provider under the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS).  
CRICOS provider number: 00115M
- Include a standard confidentiality and privacy statement. This is a suggested wording:  
Confidentiality and Privacy Statement  
This message is intended for the sole use of the addressee(s) and may contain information that is confidential and privileged. Wrongful dissemination, distribution or copying of this message is strictly prohibited. If you believe you are not the intended recipient and have received the message in error, please notify the sender by phone or email and permanently delete the original message.  
La Trobe University respects the privacy of personal information and manages it in accordance with the Information Privacy Principles in the *Information Privacy Act*. For further information visit <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/privacy/> .

***Send judiciously***

- Send messages only to the specific student or group of students who need to receive them.
- No mail system is fully secure. As far as possible, avoid mailing protected, confidential or sensitive information.



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### ***Protect privacy***

- When sending a message to a distribution list or multiple recipients, put the addresses in the 'bcc' [blind copy] field instead of the 'to' field. This ensures that individual recipients cannot see or reply to other recipients.
- Note that the University discourages the use of the 'bcc' field in other circumstances, as it is rarely appropriate.

### ***Time appropriately***

- Make reasonable allowance for study breaks, holidays and other periods when students may be less accessible and less likely to check email regularly. Mailings should be timed so students have adequate opportunity to receive and act on the information.
- Where appropriate, staff should alert students ahead of time to expect email on certain days or within a certain range of dates.

### ***Represent the University professionally***

- As official correspondence, emails covered by this policy should reflect the University's values and contribute to its good name.
- All messages must comply with applicable laws and existing University policies. Refer for guidance to the University's Internet Code of Practice. The ['Terms and Conditions for Using Blogs'](#) cover some of the same points very succinctly.
- Post information subject to copyright or other legal restrictions on a password-protected non-public website.
- Follow any style requirements prescribed from time to time by the University. The recommended reference is the [Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers](#) published by the Commonwealth Department of Finance and Administration.

### ***Communicate for understanding***

- Specify to students when and how you will use email for official correspondence.
- Keep messages simple, direct and as brief as possible. If necessary, include a web link or instructions for locating additional material.

### ***Promote ease of use***

- Include adequate identifying information, including a 'From' or 'Reply-to' name and email address so recipients know where to send responses or get more information.
- Send messages as plain text only. Do not include HTML or formatted content. Some email programs cannot translate certain formats, so recipients using those formats would not be able to read the message.
- Format messages so that lines wrap at 80 characters or less.

### ***Protect the University email system***

- Avoid sending attachments. Instead, include a link or instructions for locating the document that needs to be viewed.
- Set broadcast emails to be delivered outside business hours.
- Divide large distribution lists into smaller subsets (e.g. three distribution lists with 400 names each, rather than one with 1,200 names).
- Follow the special procedure for broadcast emails.

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### 9. Guidance on handling complaints and disputes

Complaints or disputes about the particulars or the application of this policy should be dealt with according to the University's normal processes. For details, refer to the Student Complaint and Grievance Handling Policy and Procedures:

### 10. Contacts – where to get help or give feedback

The list of responsibilities in section 3.1 suggests which areas to approach for help on specific technical and operational matters. For general advice on interpreting or applying the policy, contact:

Policy Unit

Academic Services Division

Email: [studentsystems@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:studentsystems@latrobe.edu.au)

Phone: Ext. 1854 or Ext. 3840

The Policy Unit always welcomes comments and suggestions and would like to see the guidelines function as a forum for sharing knowledge. Feedback will be acknowledged, and contributors will be informed of actions taken in response to the feedback.

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## Appendix

### Examples of appropriate and inappropriate uses

The lists in the following sections are indicative only; they are not intended to be comprehensive. The 'Procedure for Authorising Email Broadcasts to Students', which operates under the policy, may also be helpful: it contains principles of appropriateness that can be applied usefully to any University email.

#### Appropriate

- relevant policies, procedures, standards, guidelines or codes
- course and subject outlines and timetables
- re-enrolment instructions and deadlines
- course or subject information and announcements (for students enrolled in the course or subject)
- notification of the application or removal of fee encumbrances
- notification of problems with subject choices (i.e. subject rule checks)
- notification of quota rules
- billing notifications and payment deadlines
- confirmation of enrolment changes
- information about work or clinical placements (for students undertaking the placements)
- information about academic support services
- notification of results
- notification of supplementary or special examination arrangements
- notification of supplementary or special examination results
- notification of eligibility to graduate
- information about graduation ceremonies
- notification of the award of prizes or scholarships
- notification of administrative actions affecting the student's record
- approved institutional and academic- related surveys
- information about events that support or supplement academic courses or subjects (e.g. orientation programs, targeted careers expos).

#### Inappropriate

- messages containing information unrelated to official University business or without a legitimate educational purpose
- messages including large attachments
- information that the University is required by law or policy to communicate to students in non-electronic form (e.g. by express post, by phone or in person)
- messages that violate codes or policies (e.g. Code of Conduct; policies on equality and diversity, privacy, responsible use of email)
- personal, protected, confidential or sensitive information that is not material to official business covered by this policy
- broadcast messages sent to a targeted student group without prior approval at the appropriate level (see section 4.1).
- surveys that do not serve sanctioned University purposes or that are unauthorised.