

Geography & Environmental Science Email Etiquette Policy

Context:

We are all facing an overflow of information communicated to us via email, and work-life balance is a key issue arising from our recent Athena SWAN gender equality consultation. In the School we want to ensure that everyone maintains a healthy work life balance, and this policy has been put in place to ensure our School does not normalize a culture of over-work. The policy has been introduced to protect those with caring commitments, but also to send a wider message around staff wellbeing about the importance of maintaining a healthy work/life balance. The purpose of this policy is to try and reduce the cycle of out of hours (see below in definitions) emails that we send and receive – and more importantly, the emails we might feel obliged to respond to (especially ‘out of hours’) - through introducing a new email etiquette policy. Failure to engage with this policy will be raised with line managers in the first instance and passed on to the Head of School if necessary.

Some Definitions:

For the purposes of this document ‘out of hours’ means weekends, bank holidays and University closure days as well as early mornings before 8.00am and evenings after 6.00pm.

However, please also be mindful that many colleagues finish work at 4pm or work part-time and therefore have a variety of working patterns including non-working days. We are also aware that colleagues & students who are travelling overseas in different time zones will no doubt receive and send emails out of ‘normal’ hours; likewise sometimes caring commitments will mean people are working flexibly with irregular hours, however, this is usually a temporary situation (and, if this is the case this should be clearly communicated in the footer of the email). ‘Email’ also includes Blackboard announcements that we send to students.

Suggested email etiquette

Only emails sent out of hours that are marked urgent carry an expectation of a reply, thus,

- Out of hours emails that colleagues expect a reply to, must be marked as urgent;
- For all other emails sent out of office hours, we want to encourage colleagues to:
 - Use the ‘send later’ function on out of hours emails so they are sent during office hours;¹ or,
 - Save your ‘out of hours emails’ to draft and then send them during office hours.
- The sender should respect the work schedules of others and give a reasonable amount of time for a response (our policy suggests waiting at least three working days before sending a reminder, but please be mindful that many people do not work full-time and some may have caring commitments).
- If an email relates to an opportunity or is asking for a volunteer the time to respond should be clearly stated and a first come first served approach should not be adopted.
- Please think carefully regarding who you carbon copy (cc) into an email. If they do not need to be there, please do not include them.

Suggestions for supporting a better work-life balance

- During one-to-one, team or peer group meetings please reinforce the School’s support for a good work life balance, letting colleagues know that we wish to reduce out of hours emails, and that staff are not expected to respond to emails sent out of hours, unless there is an emergency or an issue is needing urgent attention;
- Colleagues are encouraged to state their working patterns in their email signatures (particularly if they work part-time),

- Colleagues are encouraged to set up 'out of office' on Outlook when you are on leave, these messages should include the email addresses of an appropriate colleague or colleagues who can be contacted in your absence;
- Colleagues are encouraged to always use subject lines on emails to indicate the subject/topic of the email;
- Tips colleagues might want to consider when sending mass emails/forwarding emails:
 - Make sure the title of the email clearly summarises the subject of the email and, if relevant, who the target audience is.
 - Either in the subject title or at the start of the email indicate the urgency of the content, and whether it is 'for information', 'for action', 'for reply', etc.
 - Briefly summarise the key points or implications of the email at the start of the email, or provide context as to why the email is being sent.
 - When sharing detailed/extended written materials (such as on university regulations), if possible please direct the reader to the relevant content (i.e., either refer to the relevant passage or use bold/highlighted text to indicate it clearly).
- It is your choice to link your mobile phone to your work email for convenience, this is not something the School requires. With the exception of those staff who have their phones provided and paid for by the University.
- We also want to encourage colleagues, whenever possible/feasible, to phone or meet up with colleagues instead of sending yet another email.

Email Etiquette for Geography & Environmental Science students

- Academic staff should encourage their tutees, supervisees and students² to abide by the School out of hours email etiquette and manage their expectations in terms of staff responding to them (i.e., that we will respond within three working days, wherever we can, or if this is not possible, we will send a brief holding email to a student informing them when we will be able to reply to their email) – although students experiencing personal difficulties, and requiring pastoral support must be encouraged to email their tutors, marking their emails as urgent.
- Student induction sessions and handbooks will reinforce our email etiquette for students, yet ensure that students are encouraged to seek urgent pastoral support if the need arises. Staff may wish to re-iterate this policy in their own modules / supervisions.