Student Communication Policy

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

As the number of communication tools continue to increase, so do the challenges to effectively monitor and manage how we communicate with students effectively.

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 sets out clear guidance for internal stakeholders, to help ensure that the right messages are being communicated at the right time and through the right channels for students. In addition, this policy outlines the channels available to communicate with students and how Communication Champions, who have been identified in each School, will assist in enforcing this policy.

Postgraduate Research Students

This policy outlines guidance for communicating with all student groups – undergraduate (UG), taught postgraduates (PGT) and postgraduate research (PGR) students; recognising that the needs of PGR students will frequently differ to other groups. In their position at the University, it is often appropriate that PGR students receive staff communications and are omitted from student communications on topics that are not relevant to them.

When communicating with the PGR community, staff should adhere the guidance set out in this policy, seeking further guidance from the Student Experience Team or Postgraduate Research School on tailoring messages for postgraduate research students when necessary.

1. **Benefits of co-ordinated communication**

   - **Engagement:** Streamlines efforts to communicate with students; creating greater opportunity for engagement with individual pieces of communication, allowing students to maximise the opportunities available to them.
   - **Culture:** Demonstrates a culture of care and a shared responsibility to improve the student experience by listening to, supporting and responding to the student voice.
   - **Feedback:** Supports the institution's Student Feedback Framework, which outlines the agreed mechanisms for gathering regular and detailed feedback to monitor, develop and improve the student experience and gain valuable insight of our student voice.
   - **Confidence:** Builds trust and confidence in student communications and the channels used to share information.
   - **Conversation:** Demonstrates a commitment to two-way communication between University staff and students.
   - **Connected:** Creates a community of engaged and emotionally-connected students, who go on to become ambassadors as alumni for the institution.

2. **Principles**

   The guiding principles of this policy are to:

   - Support institutional commitments outlined in Aberdeen 2040 to become a fully inclusive, interdisciplinary, international and sustainable University over the next two decades.
   - Implement guidance for the UoA community on how they should communicate with students.
   - Deliver impactful, transparent and timely communications, with a student focus, which maximise opportunities for engagement.
   - Provide information that is easy for students to access through the most appropriate channel, as outlined by the matrix on page 8 of this policy

- Comply with data protection legislation in the use of student personal data.
- Communicate effectively with students during a serious incident or crisis.

3. Use of personal data

The University must comply fully with data protection legislation in the use of students' personal data. We are required to advise students explicitly on 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. For more information on this visit the corporate privacy notice for current students.

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4. Types of Communication

The various types of communications issued by the University are outlined below, along with those responsible for each category. The team(s) responsible for the different types of communication are encouraged to engage with the Student Experience Team about the appropriate channels for, and scheduling of, messages.

Type of communication	Purpose	Team(s) responsible
Mass communication	Used to communicate with all students or more than 80% of students. Mass communications are used to promote institutional change, campaigns and projects. In addition they can be used to share details support services, co-curricular activities, events and regulation changes.	*Student Experience*
Corporate & crisis communications	Emails to all students with institutional updates, as well as communications about major incidents or crises.	*Communications*
Targeted Communications	Emails that are relevant to specific groups of students, such as new students, final year students, international students etc.	*Student Experience*
Operational communication	Operational messages such as IT service news, room changes, timetable changes, deadlines and any other communication related to the students' learning experience and working environment. _Departments with access to student data should use this for operational purposes only,_ not for promoting services or activities to the student community unless a student has specifically opted-in to a mailing list.	*Schools, Registry or DDIS*
Learning and teaching communication	Formal or informal communications between academic staff or School support teams with individuals or groups regarding the student learning and teaching experience.	*School Admin teams, Academic staff, Registry, Student Learning Services*
Progress & monitoring Communication	The University monitors student attendance and engagement with their studies to ensure they remain on track with their studies. University staff will contact students by email if either is deemed to be unsatisfactory. This is to make them aware of what needs to be done, and provide support if necessary.	*Registry, Schools and Academic staff*

5.   Responsibilities

All University staff are responsible for:

- Adhering to this policy when communicating with the University of Aberdeen student community

The Student Experience team is responsible for:

- Management of mass communication through central channels
- Liaising with internal stakeholders to ensure accurate, effective and timely student communications
- Management of communication with large groups of students on behalf of Schools, sections and support services on non-academic matters
- Maintenance of this policy and advice on its implementation
- Liaising with Communication Champions
- Providing advice and guidance to staff on communicating effectively with students
- Ensuring mass communications are tailored to specific student groups
- Ensuring this policy aligns to and supports other institutional policies and projects

The Communications Team is responsible for:

- Serious incident and crisis communication
- Corporate communications
- Liaising with Student Experience when contacted by departments/individuals requesting mass communications to all students or groups of students

Academic Services & Online Education 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, progression and registration (in consultation with Engagement & Conversion and Student Experience)

School administrative staff are responsible for:

- Learning and teaching communication with their students
- Operational communication related to students' School and the administration of their courses and study programme through induction and day to day interactions
- Supporting with adherence to this policy when issuing communications within Schools
- Pass appropriate information to student experience team for on-passing to students

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
- Pass appropriate information to student experience team for on-passing to students

Student support services are responsible for:

- Reacting to and communicating with students on an individual basis who are engaged with or using their service.

DDIS is responsible for:

- Sharing service news e.g., IT outages, security threats, upgrades etc.

Students, Student Groups and Societies are responsible for:

- Sharing information in adherence with this policy.

- Contacting AUSA with any requests to circulate information to specific student groups for inclusion on their communication channels. These requests should not be sent directly to School administration teams.
- Ensuring they check primary channels of communication, at least weekly and respond in a timely manner where necessary
- Maintaining up-to-date personal details on the Student Hub

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6. Communication channels

This section summarises primary and secondary channels available to communicate to and with students. Primary channels are those used to communicate with students on a day-to-day basis sharing essential updates. Secondary channels are those used on an ad-hoc basis to reinforce messages or share non-academic updates.

The Student Experience Team will continue to identify new and innovative ways of communicating with students to enhance the overall student experience.

Channel	Primary or Secondary	Purpose & appropriate use
Email	Primary	***University staff should, wherever possible, use University student email addresses for all correspondence***. Staff are not to collect and/or use personal email accounts for ordinary correspondence. To support manageable student mailboxes, a *less is more* approach should be adopted in relation to email communication. Emails should be used primarily to share information that is essential to a student's academic or wider university experience. Email should not be used as the default means of communication for extra-curricular activities or events. These should be submitted for inclusion in student newsletter or sent to the School Communication Champion or the Student Experience Team for further guidance. The Student Experience team manage segmented distribution lists to ensure that mass communications are shared only with those they are relevant to, including: UG/PGT/PGR/International Campuses/Online.
Virtual Learning Environments: MyAberdeen	Primary	MyAberdeen is the University's main virtual learning environment. Students use MyAberdeen to access 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. Only urgent messages i.e. change of room, cancellation of lecture, should be sent as a direct email through MyAberdeen.
VLE MyAberdeen Activity Stream & Announcements	Primary	The Activity stream in MyAberdeen provides a real-time list of important course activity including new content, announcements and grades. Announcements can be added to the stream to share important information with students.
VLE MyAberdeen BB Assist	Primary	Launched in 2021, Blackboard Assist is hosted in MyAberdeen and used to promote key services and support to students. This platform is updated regularly with details of services and activities available to students.

Channel	Primary or Secondary	Purpose & appropriate use
Virtual Learning Environments *MyMBChB; MyBDS; MyPA*	Primary	Bespoke VLEs support teaching of medical, dental, physician associate and medical science students. Used by over 1000 students and hundreds of staff on a daily basis to enhance the student experience. • *MyMBChB - for medical students* • *MyBDS - for dentistry students* • *MyPA - for physician associates*
Website	Primary	The Current Student webpages provide a central repository of information for all students.
Student Newsletter	Primary	The student newsletter is issued fortnightly. With contributions from both Schools and Professional Services, the newsletter provides a comprehensive round-up of University activity. The student newsletter is used to promote events, opportunities and university updates to the student community. The newsletter is tailored for different student groups and Schools to ensure that students receive information that is relevant to them. Guidelines for content are available under the News & Events section of StaffNet.
Social media	Secondary	In line with the University's social media strategy, Student Experience maintain the University's current student social media channels. These are used to share news, events, opportunities and details of support services with the student community. In addition, these channels are used to gather anecdotal student feedback. ***Facebook/Twitter/Insta:*** @StudentLifeUOA
Digital screens (aka plasmas)	Secondary	Digital screens across campuses are managed jointly by the Communications Team and individual Schools and sections. The screens can be used to promote news, events and co-curricular opportunities.
Notice boards	Secondary	There are numerous notice boards across campuses 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. Student Experience also have notice boards in strategic locations around campus which are used to help Schools and sections share information about events and initiatives to students.
Guidebook	Secondary	The UoA Student Guide is a mobile app with information for new and returning students. It is used primarily to promote events and activities to the student body, and allows students to add them to a personalised calendar within the app.
Printed materials	Secondary	Posters, leaflets and flyers. Student Experience create printed materials to promote student facing events and initiatives when required. These are distributed at designated sites across campus.

7. Guidelines for submissions to student communications

Staff from across the University can submit content to be considered in student communications managed by the Student Experience team. Content will be reviewed to ensure compliance with this policy and then shared on the most appropriate channels for various groups. If content does not adhere to this policy, it will not be shared on University channels. Before submitting content, staff should familiarise themselves with the guidelines for student communications available at the link below. Further guidance on appropriate content can also be sought by emailing studentlife@abdn.ac.uk.

- Guidelines for submissions to student communications

8. Professionalism in communication

Staff are reminded of their responsibility to serve the interests of the University and ensure appropriate content in all communications. 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 are not able to respond in a reasonable time, staff should provide an autoreply to their emails with details of an alternative contact, ensuring that contact is available in their absence.

9. 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.

10. Communication Champions

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

- providing advice on adhering to this policy
- providing School content for inclusion in fortnightly student newsletter
- advising colleagues in Schools about appropriate channels of communication for sharing information with students

11. Managing Expectations

This policy and its implications will be communicated to staff and students using a number of mechanisms including StaffNet, newsletters and the Communicating With You web page.

12. Further information

The Student Experience Team continually review practices and make improvements across the institution in a number of areas to help enhance the student experience. Implementation of a clear student communication policy will be instrumental in implementing positive change to the benefit of students and staff alike.

For more information or advice email studentlife@abdn.ac.uk.

Last updated February 2022

Student Communication Matrix			Primary channels						Secondary channels			
Message Category	Example	Responsibility	Email	MyAberdeen incl. email/	MyAberdeen announcement	My Timetable	Website	News-letter	Social media	Notice-boards	Print Material	Digital screens
Mass Communication	Campaigns, Student Services, Opportunities	Student Experience	Coordinate with StEx	NO	Coordinate with StEx	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	Coordinate with StEx	YES
Major Incident & Corporate Communication	Institutional Updates or major incidents such as fire	Communications	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Event Communication	IC events, Health and Wellbeing	Student Experience	Coordinate with StEx	NO	Coordinate with StEx	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	Coordinate with StEx	YES
Operational Communication	Deadlines, Room Changes, building works	Schools & Communications	Yes	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
Learning and Teaching Communication	Coursework, advice,	Schools	Coordinate with StEx	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Progress & Monitoring Communication	C6, C7	Academic Services	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Surveys	NSS, ASES	Survey Facilitator	Coordinate with StEx	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Yes – Recommended channel

No – Should not be shared on this channel

Coordinate with StEx - Contact Student Experience to discuss appropriate channel/scheduling