

SOMERVILLE COLLEGE

POLICY ON STAFF USE OF EMAIL AND INTERNET

Policy Statement

Somerville College is committed to developing appropriate technology to ensure the efficient and cost effective provision of services. To this end employees are encouraged to develop IT skills including using the email system as a communication tool and accessing the Internet. All use of email and the Internet by employees of Somerville College must be in accordance with this policy and with the computing Rules of Somerville College and with the University Rules for Computer Use of the University of Oxford.

Allocation of Email Addresses

Staff will be given an email address and should regularly check their post.

Email addresses with Internet access are given to those who need to use these facilities as a normal part of their work.

All email users will be issued with a unique password which will be changed at regular intervals and is confidential to the user. Accessing the email system using another employee's password without prior authorisation is a breach of policy and is likely to result in disciplinary action.

A disclaimer will be added to all emails originating from Somerville College email addresses to confirm that all emails are confidential and for use by the addressee only as this is now normal practice in all organisations.

The Legal Position

Staff should be aware that electronic text (email) has the same status in law as the printed word. This means that email communications can be potentially actionable in law in exactly the same way as the printed word for breaches of the relevant legislation such as the Data Protection Act or the laws surrounding libel or defamation.

Staff must, therefore, be aware that they have a personal responsibility and hence are potentially personally liable for the legality, accuracy and confidentiality of statements made in email communications. This applies irrespective of whether those communications are circulated purely internally within the organisation or externally via the Internet. Somerville College is also responsible for the actions of its staff.

Where defamatory statements or other comments which are actionable in law are made, or where there is breach of confidentiality, then disciplinary action may be taken.

Personal Use

The email service and access to the Internet have been provided to staff on the basis that they will be used primarily for College business purposes. However, reasonable

and limited use of these services for social and recreational purposes, where not in breach of this policy and other relevant rules or otherwise forbidden, is permitted outside of normal working hours. This is to be viewed as a privilege and if there is evidence of abuse, appropriate disciplinary action may be taken.

Training

Employees will be trained in the use of the email system and accessing the Internet and how to best utilise it in the workplace. Training will normally take place in-house and will include the employee being taken through this policy. Lack of training in the system will not be an acceptable defence when addressing abuse of the system issues.

Guidelines

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide users with an email etiquette. In this sense they can be seen as statements of good practice in using the email system:

- all emails and email attachments should be created in a minimum size of 10 pt font in standard print format.
- always type in a concise subject title, sufficient to describe the content of the email, so that the recipient can delete or be alerted to the content without having to open the mail.
- type messages in lower case for normal emails and only use upper case when there is a good reason e.g. when distinguishing replies from questions. Always use punctuation just as you would for written correspondence. Use the spell checking facility to correct misspellings prior to sending the email.
- use the Mailing Lists already created to help you target the relevant audience more efficiently and effectively. Check who is included in the Mailing Lists to ensure that your email goes to the intended group of recipients.
- avoid sending very large attachments over the network. Documents which may cause particular problems include large files with photographic images, graphics or video clips. If in doubt you should contact the IT Systems Manager.
- email is a messaging medium somewhere between a formal letter or memo and spoken or telephone communication. It tends to be more informal than the written word, but more formal than telephone conversations. You should, therefore, be very careful to avoid phrasing which may be misinterpreted or offend the recipient. The use of humour or irony does not always come across as intended and can cause offence.
- the email system should not in general be used to disseminate personal and confidential information but may be used for this purpose when there is a specific business related issue.
- anyone receiving an email which is clearly not meant to have been sent to them should send it back to the originator as soon as possible.
- emails should not be forwarded on to another person without the permission of the originator, unless it is clear to any reasonable person that the information contained in the email is not intended to be in any way confidential.
- email is not an appropriate debating forum. Do not use it to enter into discussion where it would be more appropriate to have a face to face meeting or to make contact by phone. Never use it as a means of avoiding direct contact.
- you can change the priority of an email to help the recipient assess its urgency.

- critical information must not be stored solely within the email system. Hard copies must be kept or stored separately on the system.
- if you need further advice on using the email system then contact the IT Systems Manager on extension 70661.

Monitoring Email Use and Internet Access

All use of the email system and of Internet access will be recorded and regularly monitored to ensure the system is being used effectively and in line with this policy and all relevant legislation. Employees will be considered to have consented to this monitoring by their acceptance of an email address at Somerville College and their agreement to comply with the College Computing Rules.

Hard copies of email messages will be used as evidence in disciplinary proceedings. All email messages and records of sites accessed will be retained within the College for a reasonable period.

Inappropriate Use of Email and the Internet

Although active use of the email system and of the Internet is encouraged, abuse of these systems can result in very serious consequences for the College and disciplinary action may be taken for inappropriate use, which could lead to summary dismissal. Inappropriate use of the systems would include:

- Harassment
- Personal use of the system during work time without good reason
- On-line gambling
- Accessing, using or printing any material that may cause offence e.g. pornography
- Downloading or distributing copyright information and/or any copyrighted software
- Posting unapproved confidential information about other employees, volunteers, the College, students, suppliers, etc.
- Use of the email system or of the Internet for purposes that any reasonable person would know the College would not approve of

Resolving Complaints

Employees who feel that they have cause for complaint as a result of email communications should raise the matter initially with their immediate manager and/or the IT Systems Manager. If necessary, the complaint can then be raised through the grievance procedure.

Helen Morton
Treasurer, Somerville College

10th October 2002