Thrive: Email Charter

bristol.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing

EMAIL CHARTER

As part of our Staff Wellbeing strategy consultation, we received feedback on the email culture at the University. To help change the culture, this email charter has been put together to help us all, but it will only make a difference if we all sign up and engage in these good practice tips. If we all agreed to spend less time doing email, we'd all get less email.

You may wish to consider calendaring half-days at work where you can't go online. You should be having email-free evenings, weekends and holidays but if you choose to send emails in your own time, then please make use of the Outlook facility that can delay or schedule when messages are sent using this link: https://support.office.com/en-us/article/delay-or-schedule-sending-email-messages-026af69f-c287-490a-a72f-6c65793744ba

This is not to prevent you working flexibly but tries to avoid creating pressures for others to respond out-of-hours.

We recommend use of the following statement in your email signatory to show your support for the charter and the messages we want to get across:

I try to follow the University email charter –
bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/hr/documents/wellbeing/email-charter.pdf

We also encourage you to think about adopting the following Out of Office message (or similar) but only where this does not impact on other services i.e. this may not be appropriate for student facing roles.

> I will not be reading emails sent between [START DATE] and [END DATE]. If you need me to action or read something please resend after [END DATE], otherwise I may assume your query has been addressed by others.
>
> In my absence or for urgent matters, please contact [EMAIL address]

10 Tips

1.   Respect Recipients' Time
As the message sender the onus is on you to minimize the time your email will take to process even if it means taking more time at your end before sending to make your email easy to read.

2.   Short is not Rude
Given the email load we're all facing, it's OK not to give detailed responses to all questions. If you receive a brief reply, don't take it personally and know that others won't. Wordy responses take longer to read, and recipients may miss key details if they just scan it. Similarly, it's OK if replies aren't sent immediately. Don't feel you need to give an instant response and don't expect to receive one. Skype or the telephone are your tools if something is urgent or needs a reply within a few hours.

3.   Celebrate Clarity
Start with a subject line that clearly labels the topic and identify whether the email is for [Info] or [Action] and indicate its priority. It is best to keep emails short but if the email has to be longer than five sentences, make sure the first provides the basic reason for writing.

4.   Quash Open-Ended Questions
It is asking a lot to send someone an email with several long paragraphs of text followed by a non-specific question such as: "Thoughts?". Email generosity requires simplifying and asking easy-to-answer questions. Try and avoid subject header 'Quick Question' as people may feel under pressure to answer quickly and it may not be a quick response.

5.   Slash Surplus cc's
Consider who needs to be copied into the email as for every recipient you add, you are dramatically multiplying total response time. When there are multiple recipients, don't default to 'Reply All'. You may need to cc a couple of people on the original thread or you may only need to reply to the sender.

6.   Tighten the Thread
Some emails depend on context for their meaning which means it's usually OK to include the thread being responded to but try not to extend a thread to more than 3 emails. Before sending, cut what's not relevant or make a phone call instead. The subject header should refer to the email content and not cover other topics as an aside.

7.   Attack Attachments
Don't use graphics files as logos or signatures that appear as attachments as time is wasted trying to see if there's something to open. Don't send text as an attachment if it could have been included in the body of the email.

8.   Give a Gift
If your email message can be expressed in half a dozen words, put it in the subject line, followed by EOM (End of Message). This saves the recipient having to open the message. Ending a note with "No need to respond" or NNTR can also be helpful.

9.   Cut Contentless Responses
You don't need to reply to every email, especially those that are themselves clear responses. An email saying "Thanks for your note. I'm in." does not need you to reply "Great." That costs someone 30 seconds.

10.   And Finally……………………………………

Where possible, pick up the phone, Skype or walk and speak to the person you want to communicate with and don't hide a difficult conversation behind an email. Do be mindful of FOI and GDPR as emails do form a written record.