

E-mail Policy for Students

This Policy was approved by Council 23rd June 2005 and comes into force 1st September 2005.

0. Purpose

All use of e-mail within the College and from College e-mail addresses is subject to College Regulations. The purpose of this Policy is to supplement College Regulations by:

- making explicit the application of the College Regulations to student use of e-mail
- highlighting legal issues relating to the use of e-mail
- defining College procedures in relation to student e-mail accounts
- outlining the College's Policy on the monitoring of e-mail.

It is important to note that this Policy applies not only to College e-mail accounts but to any e-mail or other electronic messaging facilities (e.g. external e-mail accounts, newsgroups, web-based discussion forums, etc.) accessed via a computer connected to the College network.

1. Use of E-mail Accounts

E-mail is the most efficient and cost-effective way for the College to communicate, particularly when a message is intended for large groups of students. It is therefore the preferred means of communication except in a few situations where it is inappropriate (these are described in 2.4.1 below).

Students are free *not* to use e-mail to communicate with tutors and the College, but must expect to receive e-mail messages from College staff and departments on matters relating to their studies. E-mail is also widely used for general information and announcements from the College, individual academic departments, and the Students' Union.

1.1. ***Sending E-mail***

While many students have e-mail accounts with outside mail systems, the lack of guaranteed levels of service on such accounts and the fact that they may be blocked or terminated without notice makes them unsuitable for use in relation to a student's studies. Also, mail sent from a College e-mail address provides assurance that the sender is in fact a student of the College and to some degree authenticates the identity of the sender.

- 1.1.1. **Students are expected to use their College e-mail account for all e-mail relating to their studies, and not to use other e-mail accounts for this purpose.**

1.2. ***Checking E-mail***

- 1.2.1. **Students who use e-mail are expected to check their College e-mail account on a regular basis.**

1.2.2. Students who are unable to do so, for any reason, should make their department is aware of this, to ensure they do not miss important information.

Since a College e-mail account can be accessed from anywhere in the Internet, students working away from College (e.g. in part-time work, on a year abroad, etc.) should not have any difficulty accessing their College account, and there should normally be no need for other arrangements. Although, technically, it is possible to forward messages from a College account to an external account, this is strongly discouraged. Students who ignore this advice do so at their own risk, and the College can accept no responsibility for a student's failure to receive information in such circumstances.

However, students who, by reason of disability or other special need, have difficulties in using a computer or e-mail software should ensure that their department is aware of this, so that alternative arrangements can be made. Such students are encouraged to contact the Assistive Technology Centre (on the ground floor of the Rutherford Information Services Building) who can offer assistance and special facilities for accessing e-mail.

1.3. External E-mail Accounts

1.3.1. Departments may refuse to send messages to personal e-mail accounts held by students on other systems, and may refuse to respond to the substance of a message from an external e-mail account purporting to be from a student until it is resent from a College e-mail address.

A message from a College e-mail account guarantees that the sender is a member of the College and authenticates the identity of the sender. Under the terms of the College's *E-mail Policy for Staff*, College staff are under no obligation to respond to the substance of a message claiming to be from a current student, until they are satisfied as to the identity of the sender, and may insist that a message be resent from a College address.

1.3.2. If a student, for any reason, has to send a message relating to their studies from a non-College account, the student must include his or her full name, College e-mail address, and course in order to identify the sender.

2. Unacceptable Use

The term "unacceptable use" is used here, as with other institutions providing e-mail facilities, to refer to any use which could lead to disciplinary action.

2.1. Unauthorised access

E-mail facilities are provided to registered students exclusively for their own personal use.

2.1.1. The following constitute unauthorised forms of access to College e-mail facilities and will be subject to disciplinary action:

- a) **Permitting anyone else to send e-mail using the username or e-mail address you have been given**
- b) **Sending e-mail using another user's username or e-mail address**
- c) **Attempting to disguise the e-mail address from which your message is sent or the identity of the sender**

The first two of these also render the user liable to prosecution under the Computer Misuse Act 1990.

Note that infraction of 2.1.1.a) may arise not only from deliberate action but also from negligence: leaving yourself logged in at a computer in a public area after you have finished using it, makes your username and e-mail account publicly available. For this reason, disciplinary action may be taken under College Regulation 24.3.3 against any user who compromises the security of the system by failing to log out after using a College computing facility.

2.2. Unauthorised purposes

Although students' e-mail accounts are primarily intended for use in connection with their studies, personal, non-academic use of these accounts is acceptable, subject to a small number of restrictions.

2.2.1. The following activities are not permitted in relation to College e-mail accounts or any College computer facilities and could lead to disciplinary action:

- a) **private commercial use of the College's computer and e-mail facilities**
- b) **use of computers in the Rutherford Information Services Building for personal e-mail at times when the facilities are busy**
- c) **use of computers in the Rutherford Information Services Building to print copies of personal e-mail messages**
- d) **sending unsolicited mail to multiple recipients.**

Students are not permitted to use the College's computer or e-mail facilities in relation to work for a commercial employer, or to personal business activities (College Regulation 24.4.2). However, use in job-seeking is acceptable. Students who need e-mail for commercial purposes will need to have their own computer, Internet connection, and a non-College email account. If you are unsure whether a particular use is permissible or not, you should contact the Director of Information Services.

While the use of College computers for personal mail is permitted, academic use has absolute priority. For this reason, during the day in term-time, students *must not* use computers in College solely for the purpose of sending personal e-mail, since other students need the computers for coursework.

The printing facilities in the RISB are solely for the purposes of academic work, and College Regulations (24.6.7) require users of these systems to minimise use of consumables. Printing out personal e-mail messages will therefore be regarded as a misuse of College resources, and any breach may be subject to disciplinary action.

2.3. Improper content

Students are expected to ensure that their use of e-mail does not give rise to criminal or civil proceedings and should note that a number of classes of content are classed as “improper” for this reason.

2.3.1. It is a disciplinary offence to send from a College e-mail account or from a computer connected to the College network any e-mail or other electronic message which is:

- a) Defamatory
- b) Obscene
- c) Racist
- d) Sexist,
- e) Bullying, or
- f) Threatening.

2.3.2. It is a disciplinary offence to send from a College e-mail account or from a computer connected to the College network any e-mail or other electronic message which:

- a) constitutes racial or sexual harassment, or
- b) might cause unnecessary distress to the recipient.

An e-mail message is, for legal purposes, treated as a publication, and is therefore subject to all the normal legal restrictions on publication, including copyright protection. Forwarding a message without permission could be construed as a breach of copyright.

2.3.3. It is a disciplinary offence to include copyright material in an e-mail message without the permission of the copyright holder

Of course, permission need not be sought where a message obviously contains information intended for forwarding or for wider dissemination, or where the original message was posted to a publicly accessible forum.

Note that the College’s disciplinary procedures may be invoked in such cases regardless of criminal or civil proceedings.

2.4. Unsuitable purposes

E-mail is not suitable for every purpose. Misaddressing may result in apparent non-delivery of the message. Proof of sending does not constitute proof of receipt by a deadline, which is mandated by coursework requirements.

Students should therefore note that:

2.4.1. Coursework which constitutes a formal part of student assessment may be submitted by e-mail only where

- a) this is specifically permitted or required by the course regulations and
- b) the submission procedure adheres to the published protocol for the electronic submission of coursework approved by Academic Board.¹

2.4.2. In the case of Visiting Students who have returned to a home institution, Registry and the Examinations Office have discretion to permit the electronic submission of coursework on an individual basis, where

- a) The alternative might seriously disadvantage the student
- b) It would not breach other regulations
- c) Appropriate security measures are applied.

2.4.3. Submitting by e-mail a piece of coursework, or any work which constitutes a formal part of student assessment, under any circumstances other than those specified in 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 is strongly deprecated, and is done entirely at the student's own risk.

The College accepts no responsibility for the non-delivery or "late" delivery, for whatever reason, of coursework sent via e-mail, except under the provisions of paragraph 2.4.1. Computer Services cannot respond to requests from students to provide proof that a particular message with a coursework assignment was sent at a particular time. Students should assume that submitting work by e-mail except under the protocol referred to in 2.4.1 will not meet course requirements.

Under the College's *E-mail Policy for Staff*, departments and tutors are not permitted to make *ad hoc* requests for coursework submission by e-mail.

While e-mail is suitable for many day-to-day matters in relation to a student's studies, where loss of a message may be of little consequence, it is not appropriate for communications of a formal nature.

2.4.4. The following are not normally appropriate for e-mail:

- a) formal acceptance of a place on a course or a similar undertaking
- b) any correspondence in a disciplinary matter or other formal dispute with the College.

In such cases, it can often be useful to expedite matters by sending a e-mail message which duplicates the information in a paper document, which will take longer to be

¹ There is currently no College protocol for electronic submission of coursework.

delivered. But it would be very unwise to rely on an e-mail message as the sole evidence of a commitment or submission.

3. Privacy & Monitoring

3.1. *Monitoring*

The interception and/or reading of e-mail addressed to individuals is generally contrary to UK legislation² and the College does not monitor e-mail accounts of students as a matter of course.

However, the law explicitly gives institutions which provide e-mail facilities the right to examine the mail accounts of individuals under certain circumstances.³ Circumstances which might be relevant to student e-mail accounts include:

- The investigation of potential breaches of the institution's regulations and policies relating to the use of electronic mail
- The need to preserve the security of the institution's systems
- The prevention or detection of crime.

The College therefore offers the following assurances with respect to the monitoring of student e-mail accounts:

3.1.1. Monitoring of College e-mail accounts will be undertaken only in circumstances permitted by law.

3.1.2. Monitoring is carried out by systems staff only on the basis of explicit written authorisation from the Director of Information Services.

A student's head of department would normally be notified of monitoring, but the College need not notify or seek authorisation from either senders or recipients of messages monitored.

3.2. *Accidental Disclosure*

One of the circumstances in which the confidentiality of e-mail messages may be compromised is when Computer Services staff deal with technical problems relating to e-mail:

3.2.1. All users accept that Computer Services staff, when dealing with technical problems relating to system security or to mail delivery, may inadvertently be exposed to the content of messages stored on College servers.

² Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000
<www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000023.htm>

³ The Telecommunications (Lawful Business Practice) (Interception of Communications) Regulations 2000 (Statutory Instrument 2000 No. 2699)
<www.hmso.gov.uk/si/si2000/20002699.htm>

- 3.2.2. **Computer Services Staff are required to treat as confidential any material in mailboxes accidentally seen while dealing with technical problems.**
- 3.2.3. **Notwithstanding the undertaking of confidentiality given in 3.2.2, Computer Services staff will report to the Director of Information Services any material inadvertently seen in these circumstances which appears to constitute a breach of this Policy.**

3.3. Refusal of Delivery

- 3.3.1. **In order to protect the College's computer systems, systems staff may put in place appropriate automated measures to prevent the delivery of e-mail messages which appear to represent a security threat.**

Such measures will be general in their application and are not targeted to individual users or accounts. In such cases the non-delivery (and the reason for it) will be reported to the sender.

3.4. Compliance with Legislation

- 3.4.1. **In responding to requests for information under the Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts, the College may be obliged to disclose the content of e-mail correspondence held on College mail servers, irrespective of whether the sender or the recipient has deleted the message from local inboxes. In such circumstances the rights of senders and recipients of e-mails to privacy have to be balanced against other legal requirements which may apply in the context of particular messages.**

3.5. Privacy of E-mail Addresses

Anyone with a College username can look up the usernames of others, and student e-mail addresses cannot, therefore, be kept confidential from anyone with a College e-mail account. However, those outside the College do not have access to details of student e-mail addresses.

- 3.5.1. **E-mail addresses of students are treated by the College as confidential, and staff will normally refuse requests from outside the College for the e-mail address of a student.**

Section 3.8 of the *E-mail Policy for Staff* instructs staff how to handle such requests.

4. Termination of Accounts

- 4.1.1. **For all students, access to their College e-mail account is closed on the date on which their course ends.**

After this date students will be unable to log-in to send or read mail. However, accounts remain live and incoming messages will be forwarded where a user has set up forwarding.

4.1.2. After a fixed period from the end of their course, students e-mail accounts are terminated and all messages deleted.⁴

Students who return to the College to start a new course before this period is over will be able to have their old e-mail account reactivated.

5. Infringements & Complaints

5.1.1. Any use of e-mail which appears to be unacceptable in the terms of this Policy or which in any other way appears to contravene College Regulations may give rise to disciplinary action.

Misuse should be reported immediately to the Computer Services via the e-mail address: *abuse@gold.ac.uk*. Messages sent to this address are seen by the System Manager, who is responsible for the security of e-mail in the College, and who will report any misuse to the Director of Information Services for action. Alternatively, misuse can be reported in person to the Computer Services Help Desk, who will refer the matter to the Director of Information Services.

Any student who receives e-mail from outside the College which might be regarded as offensive or potentially illegal, should report the matter to Computer Services. This is best done by forwarding the message to *abuse@gold.ac.uk*. (Forwarding an offensive message to this address does not constitute an offence.) The Computer Services will take up the issue with the management of the site from which the mail was sent.

Note that this applies only to College e-mail accounts – the College cannot take action where offending e-mail is sent to a non-College e-mail account even where this is accessed from a computer in College. In such cases, the provider of the e-mail account is the appropriate recourse.

Where a complaint is received which relates to a message sent by a student of the College, the Director of Information Services will institute investigation and refer the matter for disciplinary action, if warranted, under the relevant College procedures.

6. Useful E-mail Addresses

<i>helpdesk@gold.ac.uk</i>	For general enquiries about the use of e-mail in College.
<i>abuse@gold.ac.uk</i>	For reporting any misuse of e-mail.
<i>sysadmin@gold.ac.uk</i>	Enquiries about any security-related matters.
<i>secretariat@gold.ac.uk</i>	For enquiries about the use of email specifically in relation to Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation.

Queries about this Policy and its implementation should be addressed in the first instance to the Director of Information Services.

⁴ This period is set by Computer Services and is not prescribed by this Policy. It is currently 6 months, or, for students in PACE, 1 year.