



Essex International College

Communications Policy

Policy name	Communications policy
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Through its policies and in its day to day work, the College is committed to promoting equality and fairness and combating discrimination. This applies to everyone, regardless of gender, racial or ethnic background, disability, religion, sexual orientation or age and embraces the College's legal responsibilities.

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

College Mission and Statement of Values

The Mission of Essex International College is to provide:

Opportunity, Achievement, Success and Progression

College Values

To achieve the College Mission of Opportunity, Achievement, Success and Progression the College will:

- **Put people first**, care for students and staff, recognise each individual's needs
- **Make teaching and learning the top priority**, value each person and foster individual learning to develop the whole person
- **Work together with others** to raise the ambitions and achievement of everyone
- **Embrace diversity** and challenge all forms of discrimination
- **Strive for excellence**, foster openness and trust and commit to continuous improvement where learners help shape improvements and the organisation as a whole

Policy Statement

Effective communication within and beyond the College is essential to the quality of service provided and the quality of life of its members. All staff are expected to:

- Demonstrate good communications. This is critical to working together with others to raise the ambitions and achievement of everyone.
- Demonstrate a positive attitude towards their work and each other.
- Listen and be responsive to feedback.
- Communicate well with parents/guardians about their son or daughter's education.

This policy sets out the College's policy and procedure on communication by and between staff and summarises staff responsibilities in striving for effective communication with everyone.

Effective communication will be achieved when –

- All staff take responsibility for ensuring clarity and fitness-for-purpose in all forms of communication.
- Methods of communication are effective and appropriate to the context, message and audience.
- Messages are clear, simple and (whenever possible) in plain English.
- All communication takes account of relevant College policies, in particular Equal Opportunities, Data Protection, Freedom of Information, Employee Handbook, Conduct for the use of IT, E mail and Internet, and Public Interest Disclosure (Whistle Blowing).
- Methods of communication are not abused.
- Appropriate training in communication methods is provided, as appropriate.
- Communication is professional, ethical and, wherever possible, presenting a positive message.

Standards of Communication in General

Standards relevant to each particular channel of communication are included in the sections below. However, there are also general standards that apply across **all channels of communication and these must be met at all times by all staff** –

1. Conduct

The College policy on Staff Conduct sets out the expectations of the College for the way in which its employees conduct themselves. Conformity to the College Communication Policy is an important part of this expectation, as communication has a wide-ranging and significant influence on the quality of service provided by the College and the quality of life of its members.

Therefore, staff should adhere to the following guidelines –

- **Staff should present the work of the College in a strongly positive manner.**
- **This improves morale internally and builds the reputation of the College externally.**
- **Staff should only discuss other individuals or groups/teams in positive terms.** If a member of staff is dissatisfied with any aspect of the work of the College or about an individual or group/team of staff, they should communicate it appropriately to the relevant person, usually their line manager. **Negative criticism or comments should never be communicated anonymously and other staff should not be ‘copied in’ to communications of a critical nature.** If the member of staff who is dissatisfied wishes to take the matter further, they should use the appropriate College policy/procedure, usually the Complaints or Grievance Policy. These policies have informal stages that are designed to deal with such problems efficiently and, if possible, without recourse to the formal stage. It is the responsibility of all staff to adhere to these guidelines and to encourage/correct colleagues who are not so doing.
- In the case of suspected serious malpractice within the College, staff should follow the Public Interest Disclosure Policy.

2. Data Protection

In many areas of communication, the Data Protection Act is relevant and staff must be sure to comply with the College Data Protection Policy which is available on the staff intranet.

3. Freedom of Information

The Freedom of Information Act has considerable implications for College communications.

4. Equality Act 2010

In many areas of communication, Equal Opportunities legislation is relevant and staff must be sure to comply with the College Equal Opportunities Policy.

Guidelines for the production of written communications for students and staff that comply with the Equality Act are attached as an Appendix to this policy (Essex International College Communication Guidelines).

5. Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of **all staff** to adhere to the Communication Policy, as set out in this document. **The College may take action under the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure, should staff disregard any aspect of this policy.**

The Principal and Human Resources Director have responsibility for updating and implementing the policy.

6. Channels of Communication

This section contains guidelines and standards for the main channels of communication within and beyond the College. Reference is made, throughout the guidelines, to BOX.

The main channels for communication are:–

1. Memos (formal), these may be paper-based or electronic
2. Memos and notes (informal), these may be handwritten or computer generated
3. E-mail
4. College website
5. Notice Boards
6. Telephone, text SMS
7. Pigeon holes
8. Meetings and minutes (including impromptu face-to-face meetings)
9. Letters
10. Publications
11. Media
12. BOX
13. Language
14. Relevant Policies and Current legislation

1. Memos (formal) (these may be paper-based or electronic)

Memos are effective for communicating non-urgent information that might be of some complexity and needed for on-going reference. They should –

- Be electronic wherever possible and available within document libraries or other relevant folder
- Indicate clearly their context, purpose and distribution
- Be kept to an essential minimum.

Messages and memos from SMT/Principal may be provided via email. They will normally be followed up by an opportunity for clarification via a team meeting.

2. Memos and notes (informal) (see also paragraph 10 below)

These memos and notes are effective for small-scale communication on specific issues between individuals. They should show as a minimum standard –

- Who it is from.
- To whom it has been sent (including those 'copied in').
- The date sent.
- Whether action is required, by whom and by when.

3. E-mail

E-mail is effective to carry simple messages that need a response. If possible, longer documents should be stored on BOX and links emailed to staff/centres, rather than the documents being attached to emails.. Sensible usage of email will include:

- Keeping mail messages short and to the point
- Using the subject heading to identify what your message is about. Not copying in others unnecessarily.
- Making it clear what you want from the person / people receiving your email. Viewing email as a postcard. Your mail message should be authored with this in mind - an open communication that anyone may be able to read.
- When you send messages outside of the College your mail address identifies the College as being the mail account provider. **You have a responsibility to ensure that the communications that you send do not involve the College in any potentially embarrassing or libellous situations.**

Email manners

- It is easy to be misinterpreted unless you have made it very clear what you say. Readers of emails cannot see your faces or hear your tone of voice so all expression is derived from your words and punctuation
- Do not use email as a medium for initiating or prolonging a disagreement. If you have a problem with another member of the College or an issue to resolve then resolve the situation face to face.
- If you read something that offends you, do not respond immediately. It may not have been intended to offend. Take time to calm down, reread and respond without being offensive only if you consider it worthy of response.
- Do not use email to forward on jokes/ funny web sites/ attachments etc. The recipient may find these irritating and even offensive.
- Use the 'out of office assistant' to keep people informed of absences and alternative contact points

Avoiding e-mail overload

- Avoid sending large files or attachments. Sending large files will hold up the network for other users. Please consult a member of the IT team if you are uncertain.
- Avoid storing documents and attachments on email

Managing e-mail

- Delete mail messages as soon as they are no longer needed.
- Store useful messages in folders and check these regularly to identify any that can be deleted.

Email is recognised as an appropriate way of communicating information internally and externally. This includes enabling messages to be seen by people other than the original recipient. However it does not replace face to face contact with people.

Every member of staff has free access to the e-mail system and a unique address, usually

name@eic.uk.com

Staff should be clear that this does not serve the same function as a private mail account. Where messages are personal and private (ie not work related), a private e mail account is a more appropriate vehicle.

Staff should –

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Adhere to the Staff Code of Conduct for the Use of IT, email and the Internet that covers vital aspects such as security and appropriate use.

- Note that e-mails are not absolutely confidential or private and are governed by the Data Protection Act (see also above).
- If a member of staff is dissatisfied with any aspect of the work of the College or about an individual or group/team of staff or, if they believe a mistake has been made, they should communicate it appropriately to the relevant person or, depending on the circumstances, to the line manager concerned.

Other staff should not be 'copied in'

- Check and respond to e-mails at least once every day that the member of staff is at College. Some emails require a timely response to avoid delays and disruption to other people's work.

Email is not secure or confidential. Messages are not private and can be seen by other people.

Do not put anything in a message that should not or you would not wish to be seen by anyone else. Legally the laws of libel apply.

The College has the right to access staff email accounts. Staff should be aware that email messages sent from or to a College email account can inform, or be the basis of, a College disciplinary or grievance procedure, a complaint procedure and potentially, in association with other investigations, a data subject access request under the Data Protection Act, as relevant.

The right of access to information by individuals includes e mails.

All e mail messages sent outside the College using the College e mail system will be accompanied by the College's standard disclaimer automatically.

Emails to be circulated to "**All Staff**" may include:

- Notice of material placed on the BOX facility/notice boards.
- Information eg Fire Alarm tests, updates on enrolment figures, downtime on email system, etc.
- Simple reminders.
- Requests for responses via a comprehensive survey/review.

Items for information should not generally contain any significant requests for action.

Staff should avoid circulating to "All staff" such things as:

- Complex sets of instructions that must be acted upon.
- Requirements to operate new systems.
- New deadlines and timescales.

These are requests for action. **The general aim should be that managers disseminate requests to their staff on a range of issues not just those that pertain directly to their area of management.**

This strategy will enable the line manager to contextualise a request or instruction e.g.

“The HR Director has requested that I ask you to ensure the following procedures are followed in the event of a recruitment to your team This is because Please query with me if there is anything you would like to understand better about the request”.

Therefore if managers wish to make a request of “All staff” they should firstly propose the request to relevant other managers who can then contextualise and forward the request. In some cases the proposed request will require manager-to-manager discussion before implementation.

4. College Website

The College Website will provide information to staff and students including (but not limited to):

- Announcements.
- Up-to-date details on events
- Diary for the week (meeting schedule, forthcoming trips etc).
- Exam details.

It is important to maintain appropriate formats for these College publications and for items by the appropriate person, normally the IT Officer. Established roles and responsibilities of staff with coordinating roles should be maintained for *all* channels of communication, including BOX.

In order to achieve a positive, informative and interesting College website staff should be active in sending items for consideration to the Principal and Academic Coordinator.

All staff use of the internet must fall within the requirements set by the Obscene Publications act (1959), the Protection of Children Act (1978), the Telecommunications Act (1984) and the Criminal Justice Act (1988). The ACAS guide to legal considerations gives brief information on how these acts may impact on employers and staff/students.

Reasonable private use of the internet is permitted but should not interfere with work. Excessive private use during working hours may lead to disciplinary action and may in certain circumstances be treated by the College as gross misconduct.

Users may not access, encourage access or disseminate materials which the College management deems to be obscene, pornographic, excessively violent and/or offensive or that acts as an incitement to criminal behaviour. If a specific project is being worked on that would result in this material being necessary, then permission should be sought from line management. **However, it should be emphasised that this permission will be denied if access would contravene the law.**

All users of the network may have their internet use monitored and a record of sites visited can be recorded by the IT team. This information can be used in the event of disciplinary or other relevant proceedings.

All staff use of the internet must fall within the requirements of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act (1988). Staff are required to ensure the following:

Copyright applies to all text, pictures, video and sound, including those sent by e-mail or on the Internet. Files containing such copyright protected material should not be downloaded, forwarded or transmitted to third parties without the permission of the author of the material or an acknowledgement of the original source of the material, as appropriate. Copyrighted software must never be downloaded.

5. Notice Boards

Notices on all general notice boards and corridors should be regularly up-dated in term time. All posters, leaflets, business cards etc. should be given in person or placed in the Principal's or Academic Coordinators' pigeon hole and it is at their discretion, if they are displayed. Posters, leaflets etc. should not be placed anywhere other than on notice boards provided.

6. Telephones

Details of how to use the telephone handset can be obtained from the College reception .

Additions or amendments to the staff telephone directory should be emailed to the HR Director.

An up to date staff telephone directory can be found on BOX. All faults on the telephone system to be reported to the HR Director.

7. Pigeon holes

Amendments to, or additional requirements of pigeonholes should be reported to the Communication Centre.

8. Meetings

There is a formal cycle of meetings designed to meet the wide range of need for face-to-face discussions. The cycle is revised each year to reflect changing structures and priorities and full details are contained in the College Calendar.

Staff should note that –

- Attendance at these meetings (plus others called for particular purposes with reasonable notice), is a requirement. For lecturers it is within 'directed time', so a contractual obligation. For support staff, it will depend on the particular role and working pattern of each individual or team but must be agreed with the line manager
- Apologies for absence and reasons should be given to the relevant chair of the meeting if you are unable to attend.
- A positive and active participation is expected of all staff at meetings.
- Agendas and minutes will be provided wherever possible.
- Meetings outside of the formal framework should aspire, where possible and appropriate, to the standards given above.

9. Letters

Letters may be used less than in the past, due to new forms of communication, but they still have a place as a valid channel of communication, particularly where there is a need for a

permanent, signed record to be kept on file of a communication having taken place. When using letters, staff should –

- Always be professional and the content accurate. Use the official templates and font.
- Copy to those who also need to see the letter.
- Check that they have the necessary authority to send the letter (letters used in bulk mailings of, say, more than 30 e.g. to students/other key stakeholders, should be approved by the Principal e.g. for course related correspondence or SMT for cross-College correspondence, as appropriate, before being printed and issued.
- Retain and file copies as appropriate.

10. Publications

All College external and internal publications, leaflets and posters should be professional: clear, accurate, accessible to a wide range of learners/people and follow an agreed corporate format.

The Principal has overall responsibility for coordinating and producing all major publications. Staff should seek advice and support from him for publications, as appropriate, to ensure agreed standards are maintained and publications are approved.

11. Media

It is important to stress that members of staff should not communicate with the media without permission: this is to protect the College's interests and to protect the member of staff. Please speak to the Principal for further advice.

12. BOX and the Internet

The College BOX facility is now the main repository for static College documents.

Staff with responsibility for placing items on the intranet should use appropriate formats adhering to the College communication guidelines attached to this policy. When emailing staff, regarding documents, a link should be included or a search phrase that will help staff locate the document.

When searching for documents in BOX, use keywords in the search box to locate the document rather than trying to hunt through folders.

The College website for information on the College and course information is up-dated regularly by the IT team, but can be updated on a daily basis, if appropriate.

13. Language

Appropriate arrangements will be made for translations from English into another language e.g. Bengali/Chinese where this will assist communications and learning opportunities.

14. Relevant College policies and current legislation (statutory provisions) concerning communications are –

- IT security policy and procedure

- Equality and Diversity policy and procedure Data Protection policy
- Staff Code of Conduct Data Protection Act 1998
- UK Data Protection (Processing of Sensitive Personal Data) Order 2006 Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Human Rights Act 1998 Equality Act 2010

DECLARATION:

I, the undersigned, have read and understood this **Communications Policy** and agree to abide by the rules and conditions laid down.

SIGNED:

FULL NAME (PLEASE PRINT):

DATE:

ESSEX INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

Communicating with people with learning difficulties or disabilities

Disability Statement

‘Essex International College is committed to ensuring that disabled people, including those with learning difficulties, are treated fairly. All reasonable adjustments to provision will be made to ensure that disabled learners are not substantially disadvantaged.’

Please assume everything you produce in print at College will be accessible to people who have learning difficulties and disabilities. Therefore please adhere to these guidelines for all communications as a matter of good practice.

Printed materials

Layout and design

- Strong colour contrasts with clear layout.
- Bold type, clear typeface e.g. Arial and appropriate font size (normally not less than 11 or 12 point).
- Avoid glossy paper (reflectivity).
- Keep pictures separate from text.
- Avoid complex fold documents that require a high degree of manual dexterity.

Planning

- Allow for creation of viable alternative versions in timescales and budgets (for example, consider putting documents in BOX instead of on paper).

Copy

- Plain English and concise editing.

General

- Accessibility must extend beyond initial contact material to all backup and course information material and other documentation (letters, memos, forms, handouts etc.) paper based and electronic.
- College correspondence should only be in FONT ARIAL, POINT 11 or larger and on appropriate paper.

These are recommendations for your consideration:

Layout and design

- Avoid white text on pale colour paper or black text on dark colour paper as it is difficult to read.

Reprographic and print

- Always provide good quality clean masters for reproduction and consider whether or not it is necessary to print or whether the material can be produced electronically.
- Where a reprographics service is sought from the welfare team, the preferred format for centrally printed documents is electronic.

Guidelines for producing large print information

- Use point 16 or above.
- Ask the reader which size they prefer.
- Do not use more than 2 different print sizes per document.
- Use plain style fonts, such as Ariel, Verdana, Tahoma or Century Gothic. Do not fully justify text (a ragged right hand margin leads to easier reading). Do not indent paragraphs.
- Do not underline.
- Avoid usage of BLOCK CAPITALS.
- Do not put text over graphics.
- Ensure page numbering and headings/captions for photographs are also in large print.
- To emphasise words either enlarge the print size further or put in bold. Do not underline text.
- Avoid using columns unless you link the information by using leader dots

Eg Section 1 Pages 1 – 8
 Section 2..... Pages 9 – 12

- Use pastel coloured matt paper, or good contrast such as black print on yellow or blue on cream.
- Avoid glossy paper.
- If large print documents are bulky, comb binding them is generally better than stapling.
- And finally - please do not blow up (or try to) standard size print documents on a photocopier.

Communication

Preferred Language and Common Courtesies

Many barriers for disabled people are created by the negative assumptions and misconceptions held by society. These barriers can be reinforced by behaviour and language which may not seem important but which can perpetuate assumptions and cause unnecessary offence to disabled people.

Language

Depending on how it is used language can reinforce either positive or negative views of disability. As language is constantly evolving this can only be a guide to what is preferred.

Generally the preferred language always describes disabled people in an active rather than a passive role. For example 'wheelchair bound' portrays a negative image of the person, while 'wheelchair user' is an active term which shifts the emphasis from the wheelchair to the person. The word 'special' when referring to disabled people tends to either mean extraordinary or not good enough, and is therefore viewed as patronising. Most disabled people prefer the term 'disabled people', rather than 'people with disabilities,' and therefore this is the term we recommend.

Language to avoid	Preferred language
the disabled	disabled person/people
handicapped person/invalid	disabled person
able bodied	non disabled person
the blind	blind person/person with a visual impairment
the deaf	deaf person/person who is partially deaf
suffers from/is a victim of/is crippled by	person who has/person with
spastic	person with Cerebral Palsy
epileptic	person with epilepsy
wheelchair bound	wheelchair user

Common Courtesies

1. It is quite acceptable to offer assistance to a disabled person if you want to, but wait until your offer has been accepted before you help. Always ask the person how they would like you to help, rather than assuming that you already know the best way.
2. A wheelchair is part of the body space of the person who uses it. Do not lean on it. Do not crouch down when speaking to a wheelchair user. Attempt to put yourself at the same level by sitting on a chair.
3. Never talk to a disabled person through a companion or personal assistant. Make eye contact in the same way as you can would with anyone else.
4. Common expressions such as "see you later" or "have you heard about" are acceptable to visually or hearing impaired people.

Meeting Disabled People

People who are Deaf

1. Do not make assumptions about how a deaf person will communicate. Always ask what the person's preferred method is.
2. If an interpreter is present remember to speak to the person you are meeting rather than to the interpreter.
3. Do not shout when you are speaking directly to a person who is deaf. Sometimes it may help to use written notes, but again ask the person.

Lip Reading

1. Do not assume that everyone who is deaf can lip read. Always ask the person when you first meet them.
2. If they do lip read remember the skill is never wholly reliable. It requires intense concentration and is very tiring. There are some guidelines to follow when meeting a person who is lip reading:-
 - look directly at them and speak slowly and clearly.
 - use facial expressions, gestures and body movements to emphasise the words used (only 3 out of 10 words are visible on the lips), face the light and keep hands, and food away from your face when speaking, if you need to attract the person's attention, do so with a light touch on their shoulders or a wave of your hand.

People who are Blind or Partially Sighted

1. Identify yourself clearly first of all and introduce anyone else who is present. Try to indicate where they are placed in the room.
2. When offering a handshake, say something to indicate that you wish to shake hands.
3. When help is needed on unfamiliar ground, offer to help before doing so by saying, "let me offer you an arm". This will enable you to guide rather than propel the person.
4. When offering a seat, first place the person's hand on the back or the arm of the chair so that they are aware of the position of it.
5. When talking to a group, remember to say the name of the person to whom you are speaking.
6. At the end of a conversation do not leave someone talking to an empty space. Say when you wish to end a conversation or to move away.

People with Speech Difficulties

1. Do not correct or speak for a person with speech difficulties. Wait while the person talks and resist the temptation to finish their sentences.
2. If you have difficulty understanding what is being said, don't pretend. Repeat what you understand and the person's reactions will guide you, or ask the person to repeat what they have said.

People with specific learning difficulties/Dyslexia

1. People with dyslexia may experience difficulties with reading, handwriting, spelling, organisation of written work, memory, sequencing and concentration span. Furthermore they may be unwilling to ask for help or clarification because they do not want to highlight their difficulties. Being sensitive to this can help an individual to talk about what supports they might require.
2. Give people with reading difficulties plenty time to read and understand the text. Do not expect them to read aloud in public or comment at once on a piece of writing.
3. Forms can be difficult to fill in. Offer to help the person.
4. When giving a task, make sure instructions are clear, written in clear print or delivered at a reasonably slow pace if the task is given orally.
5. Usually the oral skills of a person with dyslexia are far stronger than their writing skills. Their contribution to a group discussion will, therefore, be much greater if they do not feel pressurised to produce a written account of the discussion or to take notes for the group.
6. Specific assessment arrangements are confidential. It is therefore a breach of confidentiality to refer to specific arrangements apart from in a meeting between tutor and student.

Interviewing Disabled People

1. Conduct interviews with disabled people as you would with anyone else.
2. Any questions concerning an interviewee's disability should be strictly relevant to the post or course they are applying for. Before asking a question about a person's personal life, consider whether you would put this question to any other interviewee.
3. Do not make assumptions about an individual's ability to perform certain tasks. It is much better to ask them. Disabled people often develop innovative solutions to everyday problems with or without technical aids or personal support.
4. Try not to rely on third parties for information or opinions about a disabled person's capacity to succeed at work or on a particular course. As you would with any interviewee, form your own judgements from discussion with the person themselves. Supporting information in relation to a person's abilities, particularly someone who has been unemployed, may be available from a voluntary organisation which has worked with them.