

## STUDENT CONTACT POLICY

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This document sets out the policy for students, academic and technical staff, aiming to provide clear guidance to ensure clear articulation of our institutional expectations when communicating with our learners.

**ORGANISATION:** FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY

**APPLIES TO:** STAFF & STUDENTS

**POLICY OWNED BY:** PROVOST

**REQUIRED CONSULTEES:** DR RUSSELL CRAWFORD (DIRECTOR OF LEARNING & TEACHING), VICKY GOSLING (DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL EXPERIENCE), ANNA BROWN (HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS), BEN BULL (HEAD OF LEGAL & COMPLIANCE)

**APPROVED BY:** VICE CHANCELLORS EXECUTIVE GROUP (VCEG)

**DATE APPROVED:** MONDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2021

**REVIEW DATE:** THURSDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2024

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## 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 As one of only two NSS themes where Falmouth University dropped during the 2020/21 cycle, the “teaching” theme was of particular interest as an area of improvement. On receipt of substantive student feedback related to communication response times, this resulted in conversation at Academic Directors Forum (Sept 21) requesting development of a student contact policy to help address this feedback moving forward.
- 1.2 This document sets out the contact policy for students, academic and technical staff, aiming to provide clear guidance to ensure clear articulation of our institutional expectations when communicating with our learners. This policy and its associated linked guidance are intended to help establish clear behavioural boundaries in the interests of learning community wellbeing and to aid our commitment to offering an excellent student experience.

## 2 SCOPE

- 2.1 This policy covers communication between:
- **Academic Staff** - covers both academic and technical staff as a part of the direct student learning experience
  - **Students** – covers all enrolled students, both online and on-campus

## 3 RELATED INFORMATION

- 3.1 This policy should be read alongside of the following related policies, guidance and procedures:

Audience	Links to guidance
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Regulations, Policies &amp; Procedures for Students</a></li></ul>
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Social Media Policy</a></li></ul>

## 4 KEY DEFINITIONS

- 4.1 Integral to this policy is the understanding of what is meant by formal, informal, and social communication in a university context, related to learner communications. This is defined as follows for the purpose of this policy:
- **Formal** – communication directly related to the academic progress of a student, forms a part of a formal record of communication and is typically time bound. It

should be backed by an institutional procedure to be able to progress and will provide an official document of record.

- **Informal** – communication unrelated to academic progress and typically is an enhancement of the learning experience such as questions about events that are running, etc. and is not deemed part of the official document of record
- **Social** – anything outside of the direct academic experience

## 5 STUDENT CONTACT PRINCIPLES

- 5.1 Falmouth University is committed to ensuring all students benefit from an excellent student experience and feel part of a supportive community throughout their studies and beyond. Part of aiding this experience is through having clearly defined communication channels for agreed purposes.
- 5.2 Institutionally, we remain flexible to engage with other supported communication route(s) in service of enhancing our learners' experience but are clear that we have one preferred and clearly structured set of expectations when using email as the formal communication route.
- 5.3 University accounts will be used to communicate in all cases i.e., university email account, your online account for use in MS Teams etc.
- 5.4 The principle of "less is more" should be adopted, with communications carefully thought through for both content and tone, and the appropriate communication channel used.
- 5.5 All academic staff and students should be encouraged to check their email on a regular basis and respond in a timely manner where necessary.
- 5.6 Both parties commit to answering and addressing any questions asked as fully as possible to aid learning and understanding.
- 5.7 Staff are not permitted to collect and/or use other personal email accounts for correspondence as covered in this policy.
- 5.8 In recognition that some of our learners might require slight adjustments if they are online students, the principles of this policy remain the same.

## 6 STUDENT CONTACT METHODS

- 6.1 Our primary method of communication is **email** for all formal correspondence between staff and students.

- 6.2 Other University supported communication channels will be deemed informal correspondence and will not be subject to the expected response times as stated in this policy.
- 6.3 The University does not promote the use of any social media for formal or informal communications as a part of the learner experience.
- 6.4 For guidance on what communication channel to use and when please see Modern Office Guidance documentation.

## 7 RESPONSE TIMES

- 7.1 Academic staff are expected to normally respond to queries made *via* email within 3 working days (72 hours) between Monday to Friday, with no expectation of reply at the weekend or outside of work hours.
- 7.2 If academic staff know in advance that they will be unavailable to respond to student emails within the next 72 hours, they are expected to set up an “out of office” reply to indicate their anticipated period of absence, their anticipated date of return and who to contact in their absence.
- 7.3 Informal communications have no agreed set response time, but staff and students should endeavour to respond in a timely manner.

## 8 CONTACT INFORMATION

- 8.1 All staff should clearly state their work pattern (including days and hours if part time) as a part of their email signature.
- 8.2 Out of office automatic responses should be set when staff are out of the office with a clear indications of expected return date and an alternative contact.
- 8.3 Students should ensure that their contact information is kept up to date on [MyFalmouth](#).
- 8.4 See detailed staff guidance in Modern Office Guidance documentation.

## 9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The impact assessment process is currently being reviewed. This section will be updated following conclusion of the review.

### Equality Impact Assessment

Review of this Student Contact Policy (03/11/21) for equality and impact found:

- Page 2, Section 3.1 – the links in the table that exist at this date go to SharePoint pages which were created by the Digital Learning team and are therefore accessible and appropriate. All outstanding links (highlighted in Yellow) will require to be similarly checked for accessibility.
- and appropriateness when these documents are ready.

- Page 3, Section 4.1 – the definitions for Formal and Informal are general but could be interpretable, which is why we have opted to keep these brief but also to contextualise the difference between each as either related or unrelated to “academic progress”, which gives the reader a functional comparator to adopt in the first instance when trying to discern which to use.
- Page 3, Section 5.6 – we have use “parties” here to describe both students and staff for ease and to be as inclusive as possible rather than provide a list which might be time-limited moving forward
- Page 3, Section 5.8 – We have intentionally not specified the nature of what constitutes “additional needs” in our online learners so as to be as inclusive as possible and the included links to Fal Online expectations inform this point.
- Page 4, Section 7.1/7.2 – the 72 hour expectation is blanket and intentionally does not specify or account for working hours, patterns or part time staff availability because this timeframe is both reasonable, benchmarked and in line with most professional services SLA`s. Academic schools can chose to take this into account when they enact this policy as well as let the implantation be informed by module evaluation and SSLG feedback.

No further adjustments are needed at this time related to EIA.

## **10 CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

**10.1** Ben Bull, Head of Legal and Compliance with guidance from Prof. Eunice Ma, Provost.