College Policy and Guidelines for Corresponding with Students using Email

1. Policy and Guidelines

1.1 Introduction

Email is a key mechanism for communication of official College information to students by the College. In many cases it is becoming the default means of communication reducing the cost and environmental impact of paper based communications.

The introduction of the "My Studies at Birkbeck" portal allows students to maintain their own contact information (this could be a College-based email account or the student's personal email address maintained by an external provider). It is important that all College staff use this student contact email information for all email correspondence with the students.

The purpose of this policy is to set out acceptable use by College staff in communicating with students via email. It is intended to ensure that any message has a high chance of delivery, improve the chances of it being read, while reducing the inconvenience to students and the possible impact to the wider College email systems and services in the event of problems or complaints.

1.2 General Principles

All email correspondence with students will be to their nominated contact email address held within SITS.

New students (from 2009 intake) will not automatically be allocated Birkbeck mailboxes, and their contact email address will be collected during the admissions process. Students must be informed of the purposes to which their email address will be used, and informed of the "no publicity" flag, which will be used to reduce offence caused by Unsolicited Bulk Email (Spam). Students who wish to maintain a Birkbeck mailbox will be able to do so upon request.

Students are responsible for maintaining their contact email address via the *My Studies at Birkbeck* portal. This needs to be communicated to all students. If they have a Birkbeck mailbox and wish to use that, they will enter the Birkbeck email address as their contact email address. Degree students will, in any case, be asked to confirm/update their contact email address as part of the annual on-line enrolment process.

Distribution email lists should be used where possible.

No messages should be sent from anonymous email addresses, or invite a response to an unmonitored mailbox.

Use of multiple addresses for the same student is not permitted.

1.3 Methods available for staff to use email addresses held within SITS

- Distribution lists are available (e.g. a list for all degree students) which are kept up to date automatically, and can be created based upon set criteria. Sending to the distribution list can be restricted if needed. Ideal for large recipient groups, and where periodic messages are being sent to the same groups of recipients. Additional distribution lists may be requested from ITS.
- Lists of addresses can be obtained from the BSIS portal based upon a number of search criteria, providing a list of addresses which on clicking the "open email client" option populate the BCC field of Outlook. Suitable for messages sent to recipients numbering up to a few hundred, but limitations in the email client may restrict larger recipient lists, and a distribution list should be used.
- A number of standard letters are available within SITS. Text is put in place by Registry or BSIS staff, and these can be used to send personalised messages.
- A copy of students' contact information is held within Blackboard. Staff and students using Blackboard may send to selected students or groups.

1.4 Guidelines for use

The following guidelines are required to reduce the chance of outgoing email being regarded as Spam by recipient systems, to reduce the chance of email being dropped or delayed, and to reduce the likelihood of recipient complaints. They have been drawn up as a result of research into best practice in the area and the guidelines offered by the large providers, including Google, Hotmail, Yahoo and AOL.

Content of the message
- Use only Birkbeck addresses in the From: and Reply-to: header addresses. They must be valid addresses capable of receiving email
- The email must be relevant to the recipients.
- Subject lines must accurately describe content.
- Email should be personalised if possible.
- Great care should be used when linking to HTTP URLs, which should not link to IP addresses or non-standard ports.
- Recipients should never ask for personal information or passwords in email.
- Chain messages should never be forwarded.
- Messages should include an email "signature" with sender and College contact details.
- The email addresses of other recipients should never be revealed.

Unsolicited Bulk Email (spam)
- Marketing email, and anything not essential to the course, should not be sent to those recipients who have opted-out by the use of the no publicity flag held within SITS.
- Details of the opt-out should be included on every marketing email which is sent out.
- Bulk email should be tailored and targeted to smaller groups of recipients where possible.
- Unsolicited Bulk Email should include our street address and contact details.

<u>Dealing with complaints</u>
- Staff responsible for sending a message are responsible for dealing with complaints.
- Messages which generate a NDR (Non Delivery Report or bounced message) must be acted upon.
- "Permanent" error messages must be acted upon immediately.
- Staff must stop sending mail to any ISP, server, or individual at their request.
- Complaints relating to non-delivery of messages will be investigated by ITS, but are limited to establishing whether the recipient mail servers accepted the message.

<u>Other recommendations</u>
The following are included as measures which can help to reduce the chances of messages being blocked, but may not be appropriate in all cases.
- Try to persuade recipients to put our sending addresses in their online address books
- Use shared mailboxes if appropriate, rather than individuals' addresses for sending email.
- Avoid images in email where possible – include ALT tags on all images that are sent.
- Send mail in plain text format where possible.
- Do not make and send HTML emails, which do not work in the same way as a web page and creating them requires a great deal of specific knowledge and testing. If html email is required, see http://www.bbk.ac.uk/its/services/forstaff/html_emails.
- Do not send Javascript.

IT Services
May 2009

(agreed at the meeting of C&IT Committee - May 2009)