

## **A MASS MAIL POLICY FOR THE UFS**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 For a long time there has been a need to ensure effective use of the UFS's email facility for purposes of mass communication within the institution.
- 1.2 This powerful medium enables an employee / department / support service / faculty of the UFS to communicate with many colleagues of the UFS instantaneously and directly to their PCs – that is, as a mass-email facility and means of internal communication.
- 1.3 Because of the fact that this mass-email facility offers instantaneous communication with more than one recipient, and given the pressure to communicate on a range of official matters with a range of audiences, the facility can become overused and abused, negating the objective of effective communication.
- 1.4 This policy is therefore intended to provide a framework for more effective internal communication by means of the email facility.

### **2. SCOPE OF THE POLICY**

- 2.1 This policy relates to the mass mailing of information by UFS staff to other UFS staff members by means of the electronic mail (email) facility provided by the University of the Free State (UFS) to employees of the UFS, whether for official or personal business.
- 2.2 It covers all types of email communication and includes, among others: announcements, minutes, electronic newsletters, as well as email received from outside the UFS which is then disseminated within the UFS.
- 2.3 It covers all campuses of the UFS.
- 2.4 In particular, the policy focuses on the sending of any email, for whatever reason, to more than 20 recipients (see definition below).
- 2.5 However, certain aspects of this policy excludes official emails distributed within faculties / or emails within departments / or within support services that are aimed at staff WITHIN THOSE SECTIONS of the UFS.

### **3. OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY**

#### **3.1 Effective communication**

- 3.1.1 The policy seeks to ensure effective communication at all levels of the UFS.
- 3.1.2 The policy also seeks to address the information overload among staff.
- 3.1.3 Given the information and communication needs in the modern working environment, and the UFS as a large and complex organisation, it is essential that communication must comply with certain requirements such as being relevant for the receiver, it must be correct and reliable, it must be timely and targeted at the right person.

### **3.2 Efficient use of resources**

- 3.2.1 The policy seeks to promote the efficient use of resources.
- 3.2.2 As with any other means of communication, there are resource implications, such as overload of the network.
- 3.2.3 With regard to the email facility, there are technical resources involved, as well as financial resource implications for the employer in operating the facility.
- 3.2.4 It is therefore important that the policy should address these resource issues.

### **3.3 Clarity on legal aspects**

- 3.3.1 The policy also provides direction on legal aspects which have become important given the proliferation of electronic communication throughout the world.
- 3.3.2 As an employer, the UFS is obliged to inform employees about the legal implications of using this facility.

### **3.4 Usable guidelines for employees**

- 3.4.1 Finally, the policy seeks to provide practical and usable guidelines for employees who wish to communicate with other UFS employees by means of mass mail.
- 3.4.2 These guidelines are contained in a table attached to this policy.

## **4. THE UFS CONTEXT**

The growth of the UFS as an institution of higher education over the past few years and the changing higher education landscape have brought about several communication challenges:

- 4.1 The volume of requests for management information, including inputs in respect of submissions, various annual reports, surveys, employment equity reports, etc.
- 4.2 The dissemination of management information, including important policy information, management decisions, and other official information.
- 4.3 The undifferentiated dissemination of information of all kinds, including personal emails, trade union newsletters.
- 4.4 The absence of a generally accessible central source of policy information, as well as information on procedures and a source of documentation.
- 4.5 Lack of response to requests for information or late responses.
- 4.6 Lack of awareness of the relevant policies, rules, procedures and regulations.

## **5. THE SPECIFIC CHALLENGE OF MASS EMAIL**

- 5.1 Mass email is a very powerful communication medium that must be used with the greatest of care. The overuse of the medium can lead to recipients becoming insensitive to the important messages and news being communicated through this medium and could lead to the messages being deleted without being read, or opened but never read, or read without attention being paid to their importance.
- 5.2 An additional problem is the fact that the UFS's computer system becomes overloaded with messages that are not important or official and that increase costs and maintenance of the system. The danger also exists that viruses can be spread throughout the

UFS system, which can become inoperative and cause disruption for users of the system. Mass email as a communication facility must therefore be regulated carefully.

- 5.3 This policy therefore seeks to re-establish mass mail as a form of email communication that is effective and vital for the UFS and to rid it of its label of being "junk mail"
- 5.4 The objective of this policy is then to ensure that mass email at the UFS functions effectively as a means of communication with clear guidelines for all users.
- 5.5 Staff are entitled to use the institution's equipment and resources to communicate with colleagues for official purposes and the UFS reserves the right to determine guidelines for how this communication should occur.

## 6. DEFINITION

Mass email is any electronic email communication that aims to reach 20 or more staff members or students of the UFS for whatever reason.

## 7. TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 To relieve pressure on the computer system, messages may only be sent to and from users on the Groupwise system.
- 7.2 To prevent the spreading of viruses, no attachments may be sent to more than 20 persons unless the attachment is in PDF format.

## 8. TYPES OF MESSAGES

The following types of messages may be sent using the mass email facility of the UFS (see also section 17):

- 8.1 Announcements / decisions / other official information from the management of the UFS.
- 8.2 Official information regarding the functioning of a faculty / department / support service of the UFS.
- 8.3 Policy documents / regulations of the UFS
- 8.4 Information affecting the work situation of UFS employees, such as power outages, computer viruses, training, etc.
- 8.5 Information regarding the safety and wellbeing of UFS employees, such as life-threatening emergencies (fires, floods, etc.).

### Other messages:

- 8.6 No advertisements / promotions for any outside organisation / company will be allowed via the email or mass mail system of the UFS. However, advertisements / promotions where the UFS is involved may be allowed if approved by the Director: Strategic Communication.
- 8.7 Communication from trade unions must be directed only at members of the trade union and may not be for general distribution. This communication to members will only be permitted once a week. It must also indicate clearly that it originates from a trade union and that it is aimed members of that union.

- 8.8 All other announcements of a general nature such as music concerts, cellphone packages, etc. must be placed on the intranet.
- 8.9 As far as is possible, staff must try to keep personal messages to a minimum.
- 8.10 Messages not complying with the laws of the country are not allowed and the sender will be held personally liable for any criminal action (see number 15).

## **9. WHO MAY SEND MESSAGES**

- 9.1 Official communication for mass distribution is the responsibility of the Division: Strategic Communication.
- 9.2 No one may send a communication for mass distribution (see definition) before it has been cleared with the Division: Strategic Communication. It must then be sent from above-mentioned Division.
- 9.3 Deans and heads of department and line managers of support services retain the right to communicate with their own staff on official UFS matters.
- 9.4 A trade union to communicate with its members.

## **10. FREQUENCY OF MESSAGES**

- 10.1 A maximum of two electronic email messages per week (in the form of the UFS Digest) may be sent by the Division: Strategic Communication, with the understanding that emergency messages cannot be subject to frequency limitation.
- 10.2 A trade union may use this facility only once a week to communicate with its members

## **11. LENGTH OF MESSAGES**

- 11.1 No message longer than 2 (two) A4 pages may be sent.
- 11.2 Any message longer than this must be posted on the intranet with a link to it that is sent to staff via email.

## **12. LANGUAGE POLICY**

- 12.1 All messages must be in Afrikaans and English, in compliance with the language policy of the UFS.
- 12.2 Where a message is provided in one language only, the translation must be provided before the information is distributed.

## **13. DURATION OF THE MESSAGE**

- 13.1 All messages must be sent with a time limit (shelf life) so that messages that are not opened and read by the end of this time limit can be deleted automatically.
- 13.2 This will help to relieve the pressure on the computer system.
- 13.3 This facility can be activated with the help of Computer Services.

**14. FACULTY OR DEPARTMENTAL EMAIL**

- 14.1 These emails are the responsibility of the respective deans / directors / departmental heads, with the proviso that the messages being communicated must comply with the general stipulations of this policy.
- 14.2 This policy is therefore not intended to restrict communication within faculties or departments or support services.

**15. LEGAL ASPECTS**

- 15.1 The University of the Free State (UFS) does not accept any responsibility or liability for the content of any message or email, whether from an individual staff member to another staff member, or whether distributed officially within faculty or departmental or support service context.
- 15.2 The sender of the email or message accepts liability for it and can be charged criminally or face civil proceedings in his or her private capacity for any offence committed in terms of the South African law.
- 15.3 Messages that may not be sent, include the distribution of email or messages that promote hate speech or racial prejudice, that are gender insensitive, include pornographic material or images, as well as email or messages that reveal confidential information of the UFS to third parties.

**16. GENERAL GUIDELINES**

- 16.1 If possible, email must be sent directly to staff who should receive it and not via the Dean.
- 16.2 The Dean may, however, receive a copy if he / she needs to be informed about the matter.
- 16.3 Documents that are sent out must be accompanied by:
- an executive summary;
  - an indication of the status of the document;
  - instructions as to what should be done with the document.
- 16.4 If documents are to be distributed in faculties, they should already have been translated before they are sent to the faculties.

## 17. PROPOSED SYSTEM OF ELECTRONIC / MASS COMMUNICATION

Communication channel	Purpose	Content / info / messages to be communicated	Classification of content	Frequency	Contact person / Responsible
<b>UV Digest / UFS Digest</b> (email-based newsletter)	To inform all staff of official decisions / announcements / events etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vacancies</li> <li>• Functions / lectures</li> <li>• Appointments, promotions</li> <li>• Campus upgrading</li> <li>• Death of a staff member</li> </ul>	Medium priority	Twice a week (Tuesdays and Thursdays)	Leonie Bolleurs
<b>Blitsnuus / Newsflash</b> (email-based alerts)	To inform staff about urgent / very important decisions / events (excluding policy info)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urgent announcements</li> <li>• Emergencies (non-life-threatening)</li> </ul>	High priority	As required	Anton Fisher
<b>Pop up</b>	To inform staff about a major crisis, disaster, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergencies (life-threatening medical emergencies, natural disasters, etc.)</li> </ul>	Must read and react immediately	As required	Anton Fisher
<b>Website:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home page</li> <li>• Current students</li> <li>• Faculty pages</li> <li>• Intranet etc</li> </ul>	To provide access for all staff and students to official information, policies, circulars, etc. To enable important academic info to be communicated to staff and students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All official management information</li> <li>• Academic information, programmes, (faculty responsibility)</li> <li>• UFS calendar</li> <li>• Circulars</li> <li>• Vacancies / HR etc</li> </ul>	Variable – depending on information	Continuous	Hannes Pieterse plus Faculty manager
<b>Policy bulletin</b> (compulsory email-based circulars with acknowledgement of reading)	To ensure that all staff receive info about major policies that affect them	Critical policy info such as HR and financial info	High priority – with an acknowledgement that message has been read	As required	Anton Fisher, Hannes Pieterse

<b>Communication channel</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Content / info / messages to be communicated</b>	<b>Classification of content</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Contact person / Responsible</b>
<b>SMS</b>	For life-threatening emergencies / urgent decisions, etc.	Loss of computer network, fire, major accidents, etc.	High priority for all staff	As required	Anton Fisher
<b>UVPERSU</b>	To keep members informed about union matters	News about union matters		At most once a week to members only	
<b>NEHAWU</b>	To keep members informed about union matters	News about union matters		At most once a week to members only	