

Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

Computer Strategic Planning Committee

Code of Practice for Mass emails

Scope

This Code of Practice regulates the use of the University's email system for mass mailings. It applies to all registered users of University electronic mail systems, whether or not provided by the University administration.

Status

This Code of Practice was agreed by the University's Computer Strategic Planning Committee on 20 June 2005, and subsequently ratified under the normal arrangements.

Validity

This Code of Practice is valid until further notice.

Background

The University's email system has a reasonable capacity to send mail messages to large groups of users (such as all students, all staff, students selected by faculty etc).

Demand exists to use such a capability. For example the University has successfully mailed all students in connection with online access to examination timetables. As University business processes are moved on-line the demand for mass student and staff communication is expected to grow. *Dialann* is circulated on-line to staff. The President's office sends messages to all staff by email. The Students Union has requested access to the system in order to communicate with all its members.

During 2004/05 improved email facilities will start to become more widely available. In particular access will become more widely available to shared standard and regularly updated electronic University address book capabilities.

The appropriate use of focused emails can yield significant benefits in terms of targeting the appropriate audience with information which they require. On the other hand over-use of mass emails to groups such as all staff and all students reduces the overall effectiveness of email communication, and experience has shown that staff/students might then ignore important messages.

This code of practice therefore provides:

1. A definition of "mass email" in an NUI Galway context
2. An explanation of who may send mass emails and how they may obtain authority so to do
3. Guidance on best practice for mass mailings

What is mass email?

In the NUI Galway context “mass mail” has generally meant “All students” or “All staff”.

The University has the technical capability to make available more finely selected standard lists (for example “All Associate Professors”; “All Heads of Departments”, “All first year Arts students”). This is not currently done on a routine basis, although such lists could become the most accurate source for mailing lists in the University.

The following definition of mass mail therefore applies to this code of practice:

“Electronic mail sent to a large linked group of users”

A *large linked group* is not defined, but the assumption is that such a group will have been selected automatically against specified criteria from the University’s staff or student records systems. In the first instance these groups will be limited to a small number of sets of staff/students, identified by published selection criteria. The onus on the sender will be to identify the groups appropriate to the email being sent.

Who may send mass email?

Mass mail within an organisational unit is not regulated by this Code of Practice (An organisational unit is an academic department, research institute, or administrative unit).

Where mass mail is sent across organisational unit boundaries then the Code of Practice applies.

The Director of Computer Services will maintain a register of persons authorised to send out mass mails. Persons who appear on this register will be provided with electronic access to all available standard mailing lists.

Additional persons may be placed on this register with the authorisation of a member of the UMT and at the discretion of the Director of Computer Services. The register will be reviewed at least annually and there will be a reconfirmation process for registrations where necessary.

The initial list of those authorised to send mass emails will be as follows:

- Members of UMT and designated staff in their offices;
- Deans of Faculties and/or their nominees;
- Heads of Administrative and Academic Support Services and/or their nominees;
- Students Union President and/or their nominees.

Restricted Use

Certain persons may be provided with access to the mass mail facility, subject to nomination by the appropriate University manager and with restricted rights as to the frequency with which mails may be sent. The initial list of such persons and the restrictions which apply is:

- Registered representatives of University commercial partners, subject to nomination by the relevant UMT member and subject to a maximum of four marketing communications in any one academic year;
- Officers of recognised trade unions, subject to nomination by the Director of Human Resources and limited to regular mailings to their members on business relevant to their relationship with the University;
- Candidates for Governing Body and other University elections, subject to the prior written approval of the An Rúnai and using distribution lists provided on the authority of An Rúnai.

Guidance on Best Practice

Prospective senders should always consider whether mail is the right medium for their message. Use should be made of Web based facilities such as the Press and Information Office web site, Computer Services Bulletin Board or departmental/office web sites to inform staff/students.

Senders of mass mails should observe the simple consideration and courtesy which membership of the University community implies. In particular, the use of mass email should be confined to official University business as follows:

- Notification of official University events, meetings, seminars etc.;
- Notification of University Sports events and results;
- Notification of external organisation events, seminars etc. where such events are in accordance with the mission of the University;
- Personnel notices such as vacancies;
- Notification of new services and service interruptions;
- Security, Health and Safety Notices;
- Communications from the President's Office;
- *Dialann*;
- Other official newsletters and bulletins of interest across the University;
- The weekly Students Union briefing.

Mass mails should not be sent:

- Anonymously;
- More than once;
- On behalf of suppliers or prospective suppliers;
- For any commercial purpose;
- For any personal advocacy purpose;
- To publicise social, sporting or artistic events which have not been organised under the official auspices of the University.

In addition mass mails:

- should never contain attachments or embedded images. In most cases a simple text message should suffice. Alternately a link to a web site storing the attachment can be used where appropriate.
- Should always contain a subject line.
- Should use the “blind copy” feature of mail programs. This will normally avoid including very long distribution lists in the “as received” message text
- Should be clear and easy to read. Any underlying press releases or other source materials should be modified appropriately to suit the medium.

Where doubt arises about the meaning of “Official University Business” or “the official auspices of the University” UMT members, Deans, and Heads of Support Services may provide guidance. Doubt or dispute about the interpretation of this code of practice should be referred to the Director of Computer Services for decision. The Director of Computer Services may seek guidance in such matters from the Secretary.

Inappropriate use of mass mail may lead to deregistration of the offending party.