

# **Employee Relations Newsletter: ER Matters**

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**Introduction**

Dear Colleagues

I hope you are all keeping safe during these strange times!

The ER team continue to work hard providing you with advice and guidance on all your employee relations concerns, albeit remotely. During this time we have produced some guidelines on undertaking meeting, grievance and disciplinary hearings remotely, via Microsoft Teams, Skype for Business or conference calls. The guidance for this can be found at <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/human-resources/procedures/covid/> (you will need to log in and then scroll down the page).

We are also continuing with our monthly Friday morning drop in sessions so please do get in touch with one of the team (<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/human-resources/about-us/contact-us/employee-relations/> if you wish to discuss any concerns you may have.

Now might be the perfect time for you to review if you have any training requirements for you and your team which we can provide – managing sickness absence perhaps. We can do this remotely for you should you wish.

We continue to look to recruit managers to conduct grievance or disciplinary investigations, however, you must attend our short Investigating Officer training first. If you would like to attend one of our Investigating Officer training sessions please also get in touch.

With best wishes and keep safe!

Ann Kelly
Head of Employee Relations

**Meet the Employee Relations (ER) team**

[Visit the ER Contact Us page](https://www.imperial.ac.uk/human-resources/contact-us/employee-relations/), for information on the ER team and our contact details.

**Update on Training**

**Sickness Absence Workshops**

Whilst we continue to work remotely, we are working on delivering these workshops online and are currently contacting the pre-booked delegates to agree to the change of format. Consequently, it might be that some spaces open up as the sessions were originally fully booked.

To remind you, the next scheduled dates are: 8 June, 12 August, 14 October and 9 December 2020.

**Investigating Officer Training sessions**

The same applies to the Investigating Officer training sessions and the scheduled dates are: 28 May, 30 July, 24 September and 26 November 2020.

If you are interested in either of these workshops, please contact Jackie Rajalingham: j.rajalingham@imperial.ac.uk

Further information about both courses will be communicated when we can.

**Employee Relations remote ‘drop-in’ sessions**

The Employee Relations team are keen to adapt and respond to the changes that have occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which has brought about changes to the way we work. As the College has moved to remote working, we are keen to make sure you are still supported with any ER related matters during this period. To remind you, we are responsible for supporting you manage formal procedures related to disciplinary and grievance cases, formal performance management procedures, short-term sickness absence, restructures and redundancies.

We are still here ready to answer your queries and provide advice and guidance. Please contact a member of our team detailed below and we can arrange a remote meeting using Microsoft Teams or if you prefer a telephone call.

The ER monthly ‘Drop-in’ sessions held on the first Friday of every month from 10.00am to 12.00pm will also continue remotely; please contact Tara on t.cox@imperial.ac.uk and she will be able to book a meeting with either an adviser or manager.

Next session: **10:00 to 12:00 on Friday 05 June 2020.**

Please have close to hand any information to help inform the discussion.



**Working Remotely – Email Etiquette**

As we are all learning to adapt to working remotely, we thought it timely to provide reminders about email etiquette to avoid errors or misunderstandings which could lead to serious professional consequences.

**1. Include a clear, direct subject line**

As we receive many emails, we often decide whether and when to open an email based on the subject line so choosing one that is clear about what the contents are addressing is important.

**2. Think twice before clicking 'Reply All'**

No one wants to receive a trail of emails from a group of people about something that has nothing to do with them. Ignoring emails can be difficult, with notifications of new messages on our mobile devices or distracting alerts on our computer screens. Please avoid clicking "Reply All" unless you really think everyone on the list needs to receive the email.

Similarly, you should think carefully about whom you copy in to emails and how it looks to the recipient. For example, does the Head of Department really need to be copied in and made aware of an easily resolved, minor issue; doing so could be interpreted as intimidatory by the recipient.

**3. Use appropriate, professional salutations**

Sending a relaxed email should not affect the salutation in an email which should reflect the nature of your relationship with the recipient. If you don’t know someone personally, err on the side of caution initially; it is easier to become more relaxed in your communications from an initial formal manner than vice versa.

Also avoid shortening someone's name unless you're certain they prefer it.

**4. Be cautious with humour**

Humour can easily be misinterpreted in the absence of being able to hear your tone or see your facial expression. Therefore, in professional email exchanges, it is better to leave humour out unless you know the recipient well. Also, we should be aware that something that we think is funny might not be funny to someone else.

When in doubt, leave it out.

**5. Reply to emails that need a response - even if the email wasn't intended for you**

It is difficult to reply to every email sent to you (e.g. see point 2 above) but you should try to do so including an email which is accidentally sent to you, especially if the sender is expecting a reply. A reply is not necessary but serves as good email etiquette.

**6. Proofread every message**

Your mistakes will not go unnoticed by the recipients of your email and, depending upon the recipient, you may be judged (albeit perhaps subconsciously) for making them.

Don't rely on spell-check or auto-correct as they can be unreliable (with ‘hilarious’ consequences!) Read your email a few times before sending it.

**7. Add the recipient’s email address last**

This helps prevent sending an email accidentally before we have finished writing and proofing it.

Be particularly cautious when replying to a message. If the contents of a reply to an email are particularly sensitive, it is a good precaution to delete the recipient's address and re-insert it only when you are sure the message is ready to be sent.

**8. Double-check that you've selected the correct recipient**

Similarly to point 7, be cautious when typing a name from your address book into the email as it can be easy to select the wrong name, which could be distressing to the intended recipient (and a potential GDPR breach), embarrassing for you and for the person who received the email by mistake.

**9. Be aware of your tone.**

Just as jokes can be misinterpreted, tone can also be easily misconstrued without the context which, in person, would normally be picked up from vocal and facial expressions; it's possible to appear more abrupt or dismissive than we might have intended.

If in doubt, to reduce misunderstandings, it may help to read your message aloud before sending because if the tone sounds severe to you, it will almost certainly sound severe to the recipient.

Avoid using clearly negative words such as "failed", "wrong", or "neglected".

Also, avoid the Caps Lock key as typing a sentence or word in capitals will look like you’re SHOUTING!

**10. Remember everything is disclosable and write accordingly.**

We touched on this subject in our last edition under the *Did You Know: Employment Tribunals – Disclosure of Documents* section when we advised to consider the content of emails carefully because legally they may, at a later date, have to be disclosed.

Always remember that an email leaves a trail and, as a basic guideline, you should assume that others will see what you write and, therefore, not write anything you would not want them to see.

Always remember an email is easy to forward, either purposely or mistakenly, and it's better to be safe than sorry.

**Further information**

Please click <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/human-resources/about-us/contact-us/employee-relations/> for more information about the ER team.

Please click <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/human-resources/procedures/covid/> for current general HR information.

Please contact the team if you have any questions or ideas. We would really appreciate your feedback as to what you would like to see in future editions.