



# CARLOW COLLEGE

## ST. PATRICK'S



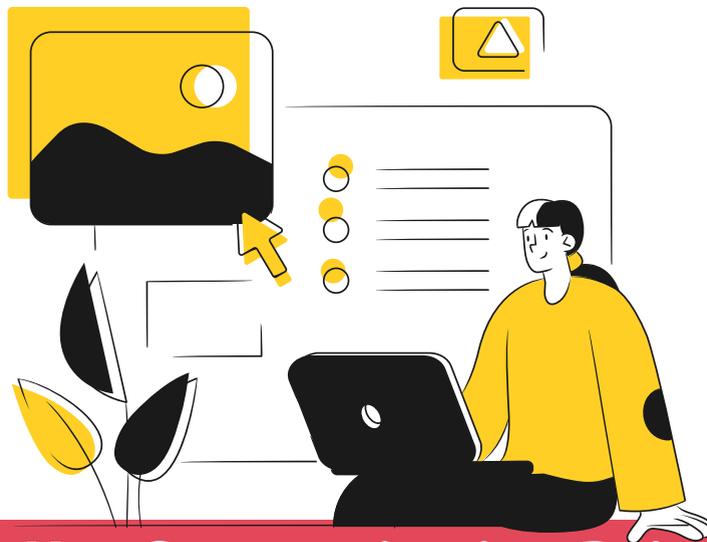
# STAFF COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

# 1

## Information

Employees are working at various locations and times due to hybrid working, flexitime and other arrangements, and are using both personal and work devices. The purposes of these Communication Guidelines are to assist employees in maintaining professional standards while working at multiple locations in addition to staying in touch with each other. Effective communication is essential more than ever in a hybrid working environment as it facilitates continuous workflow communications, boosts productivity and allows staff to structure business meetings efficiently.

*\*These Guidelines form part of the new Hybrid Working Policy and Handbook.*



# 2

## Key Communication Points

- All employees are to ensure Teams is open for contact purposes.
- Unless a matter is urgent, employees should not be contacted by call/phone message outside their working hours.
- Employees are responsible for ensuring that they are contactable during working hours and respond to communications in full within three working days.
- Line managers are responsible for ensuring that they are in regular contact with employees they manage. 1:1 and weekly meetings must be in place as standard College practice.
- Microsoft Teams is the primary tool for calls/messages. Employees should only be contacted via their personal phone where they have already agreed to this method of communication, or as a last resort.
- All communications should be replied to in full within three working days, and if this is not possible, explain this to the sender as soon as possible and give them a reply date. However, be mindful of individual working hours.

## 3

## Keeping in Touch

- Employees are to be contactable when working.
- Ensure that your status is correctly recorded in BrightHR (e.g., remote working, working from usual location).
- If you need to speak with colleagues regularly, agree boundaries for this.

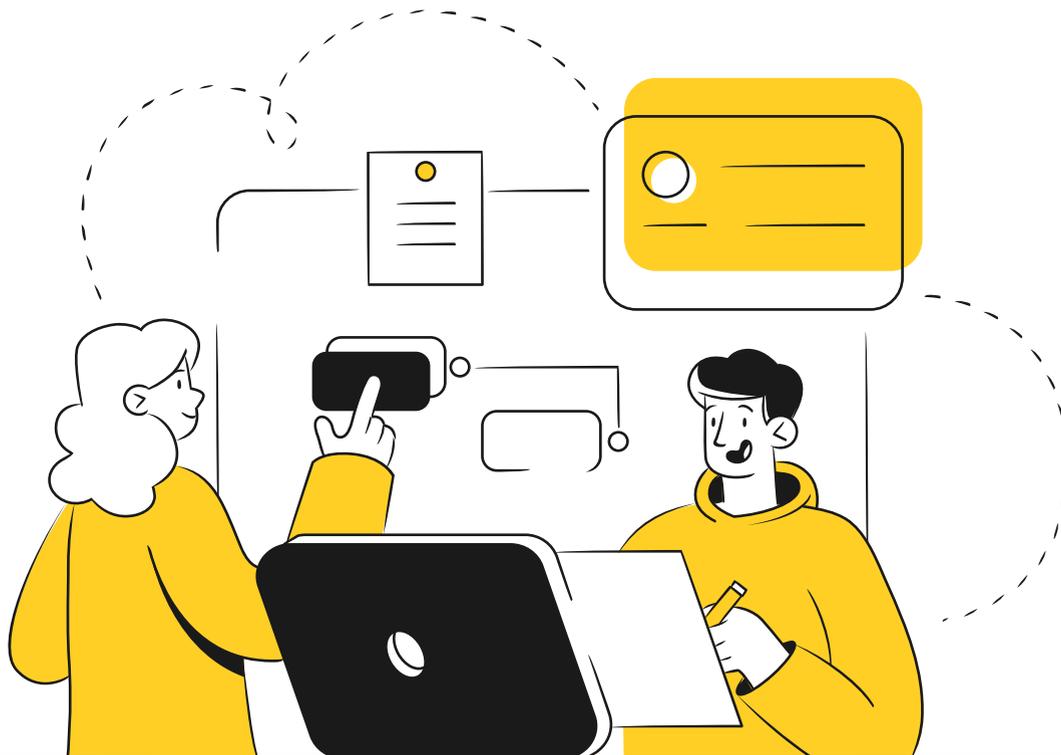


## 4

## Microsoft Teams

- All employees are to be signed into Teams when working.
- Use the status function within your Teams profile to show when you are available / busy / away / offline.
- Teams is the primary communication tool and should normally be used to call employees who are hybrid working. Employees may be contacted via their personal phone number if they have agreed to this. It should, however, be noted that it may sometimes be necessary for the College to contact employees.
- Employees using a personal phone number even if this agreement does not exist (e.g. during leave or in an urgent situation); the Right to Disconnect Policy will apply, where relevant.
- If your call is likely to take more than 10 minutes, request a meeting instead of making an unannounced call.
- Staff are to use the diary function within Teams/Outlook to manage their meetings and classes. This is to facilitate use of the Scheduling Assistant function to schedule meetings.
- To facilitate communication, turn your camera on during calls and meetings unless there is a legitimate reason to turn it off and you have notified the chair of the meeting.

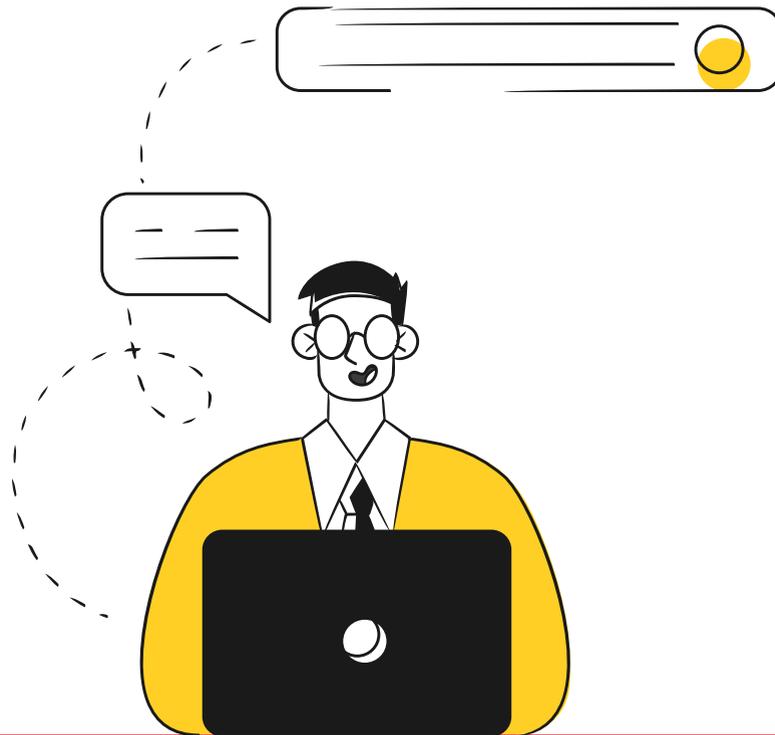
- If you only need to send a brief message, use the chat function in Teams instead of email.
- A Microsoft Teams app is available from app stores for any employee who wishes to add it to their phone.



## 5

## Communication Methods

- Use a communication method that is appropriate to the subject.
- Complex and sensitive situations are more suited to conversation than email.
- Do not schedule a meeting if an email will suffice.
- Set the importance level of emails appropriately (e.g., do not overuse the 'high importance' status).
- Work-related communications are subject to relevant College policies, *including the Social Media and Social Networking Policy for Staff, Right to Disconnect and Communication policies*. These policies are available on the Staff Gateway and the Carlow College website.
- When communicating about work matters, even using personal devices, the content of messages and other data is potentially accessible under Data Protection and Freedom of Information laws etc.
- Personal phones should not be used to send phone messages containing confidential information or personal data. Official College systems / devices should be used for such information sharing and employees should be mindful of other relevant College policies.



## 6

## Working in Teams

- When sharing documents for feedback with a team, use the document sharing function within Teams instead of regular email attachments to facilitate real-time collaboration.
- Set up a Team channel to share documents with committees/project teams/policy sub-groups etc. This cuts down on the number of emails that need to be sent.
- Use the chat function within the Team channel for quick messages.
- Attach meeting documents to Teams meeting invitations rather than sending them in a separate email.

## 7

## Meetings

- The standard length of a meeting should be approximately 30 minutes however, we acknowledge that some meetings may be identified to be longer.
- Send an agenda if you are organising a meeting.
- Only invite those who are required to attend.
- Be mindful of varied working hours when organising meetings.
- Ensure that everyone has the opportunity to contribute.

## 8

## Outside of Working Hours

- Unless a matter is urgent, employees should not be contacted by phone (call, SMS, WhatsApp etc.) when they are not working.
- Use an 'out of office' message when you are on leave and note your date of return. Provide the name and contact details of any colleague who can assist during your leave.
- Use the 'delay send' function in Outlook for emails sent outside of your recipient's working hours so that they arrive during working hours.

## 9

## Local Arrangements

- Nothing in these Guidelines prevents employees sharing their personal phone numbers with colleagues and coming to a local arrangement about how they communicate with each other.
- Where any local arrangement is in place about the use of a personal phone number, please now reconfirm that all involved parties are satisfied to continue with it.
- Employees may change their communication preferences regarding use of their personal phone number.

## 10

## MS Teams Etiquette

When attending meetings via MS Teams, cameras must be on as far as reasonably practical. While this may not always be feasible, it is the expectation that when contributing verbally, cameras must be on.

It is important that staff provide a professional etiquette when using MS Teams for online meetings and training etc. To assist with guidance on a professional etiquette to MS Teams, please see below:

- a. Your physical environment should lend itself to conveying your professionalism in line with the purpose of the meeting e.g., networking focus vs formal feedback giving vs job interview.
- b. Ensure your visible workspace is tidy and ensure you have the 'blur' background on and / or Carlow College logo on.

c. Respect the chair of the meeting. Wait a moment after the 'speaker /chair' finishes their response. Be mindful that sometimes, there may be a time lag. Be careful not to speak over colleagues or guests.

d. Ensure you take the time to understand the purpose of the meeting.

e. Do not cut a person off before you have heard the full extent of their point prior to responding.

## 11

## Non-Verbal Communication

a. Self-monitor to ensure minimal unconscious communication disclosure e.g., avoid eye rolling, wincing, audible sighing, walking out of video shot or other unconscious reactions that could be perceived to be rude and disrespectful.

b. Consciously engage with speakers: Be authentic in your practice of visible active listening signals and participate when invited by the host e.g., nod, smile and keep eye contact with speaker.

c. Mute your microphone.

d. Avoid unconscious communication.

e. Minimise background noise and protect privacy: In open office/shared spaces/busy environments use headphones.

f. Adopt agreed video communication protocols: Listen when the host is sharing what is the preferred way to communicate effectively throughout.

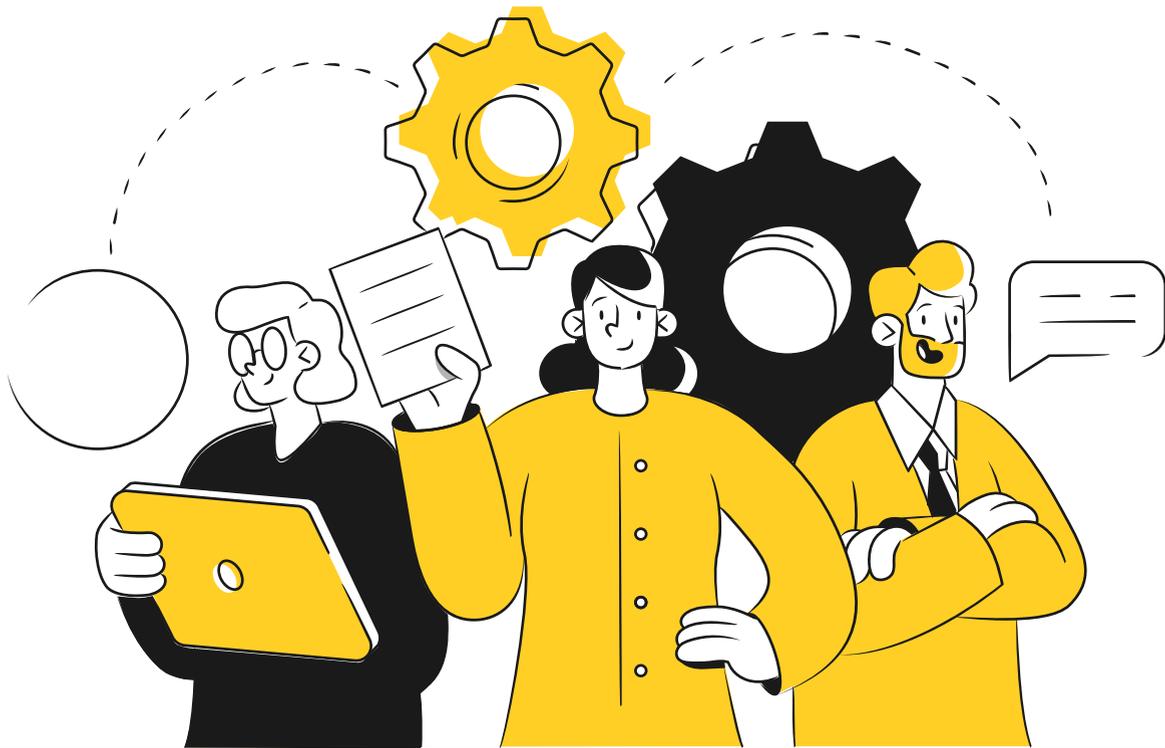
g. Manage your airtime and maximise your impact: When speaking keep it focussed, sharp and concise, and relevant to the purpose/outcomes required.

h. Limit unconscious physical movement: Do not walk out of camera shot, minimise distracting hand movements, tapping etc.

i. Be present: Minimise multi-tasking such as emailing or texting whilst online, you are on camera.

j. Build connection with other meeting participants: address your responses to other participants directly, using their name within the meeting

k. Working environment Protocols: The above are not all encompassing when it comes to professionalism within meetings, so it is also good to adhere to normal office protocols e.g., speaking in a respectful manner, no smoking/vaping etc.



## 12 Communication Checklist for Line Managers and Staff.

Working from home can result in employees feeling isolated, working longer hours, and blurring the lines between work and personal life. It is important that employees know they always have support during working hours.

To ensure they retain a strong connection with employees, employers should:

- Ensure all contact details for employees are on file and agree a means of contact;
- Schedule time for informal conversation at the beginning and end of video conference meetings;
- Provide employees with emergency contact numbers;
- Arrange IT support in the event of technical problems where relevant;
- Provide employees with information detailing when it is important for them to contact their employer;
- Make sure work is organised in such a way that the employee take regular breaks and can separate their work life and home life;
- Provide employees with regular feedback on their work; and
- Encourage employees to maintain contact with co-workers for example virtual coffee breaks.

## 13 How can I access the EAP?

You can free-phone 1800 995 955 or Email an enquiry to the specialist information service: [eap@vhics.ie](mailto:eap@vhics.ie) or

Access the following link [www.wellbeing-4life.com](http://www.wellbeing-4life.com) (username Vhicarlowcollege).