MyAberdeen Communication Guidelines for Staff
eLearning Team, updated 30 August 2018

These guidelines describe the tools available in MyAberdeen to support learning and teaching communications and provide recommendations on their use.

The guidelines complement the University of Aberdeen Student Communication Policy. Please refer to this policy for guidance on the institution’s expectations around student communication, the categories of messages along with whose responsibility it is to communicate such messages, and the different channels of communication available.

Announcements

Announcements are specific to the course or organisation where they originate. When staff create announcements they can: control when, and for how long, they appear on the “Announcements” page; immediately send the announcement as an email; include course links to guide students directly to relevant parts of the course.

Recommended Use

We recommend staff do NOT tick the ‘Email announcement’ option to prevent student “email fatigue” and to encourage students to regularly access relevant course information in MyAberdeen. The ability to send a copy of the announcement immediately via email should only be used in an emergency e.g. to announce a lecture has been cancelled that day.

Students (and staff) can set their “Notifications” to receive announcements immediately by email, in the Activity Stream and as push notifications that pop up on their mobile device. Whether notifications are set or not, all students and staff will receive a daily digest of new announcements the following day, before 09:00 hours.

Further information is available on the Blackboard Help pages for Announcements.

Discussions

Discussions are a useful way for staff and students to interact with each other in situations where the whole class benefits from a set of “conversations” to which the whole class has the opportunity (and maybe even the expectation) to engage with. Discussions are organised in forums, with each forum providing an area where the class can discuss a topic or a group of related topics. For example, staff can setup a forum for discussing and answering ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ about the course, or for discussing an upcoming assignment.

Students (and staff) can “Subscribe” to forums if this has been enabled by staff. They can also engage in forums using the mobile app.

Recommended Use

We recommend staff use discussions to engage in conversations that are beneficial for the whole class to see and engage with and which, in turn, should mean that your email inbox is not cluttered with emails
from students asking the same questions. For the latter, we recommend you make it clear to students how often you will be checking and replying to questions posed in forums e.g. within 2 working days. During this time, you should not answer any emails that contain questions that could have been posted to discussion forums. When staff create forums we also recommend they select the option “Allow members to subscribe to forum” and select “Include body of post in the email”.

Further information is available on the Blackboard Help page on Discussions.

Groups

Groups have many uses in MyAberdeen and support communications within groups. Whenever you create a group (or group set) several tools are made available to group members. The specific tools can be chosen when the group(s) are created. These include a “Group Discussion Board” where group members can create their own discussions and “Send Email” where group members can email each other. Both these tools are contained specifically within the group and cannot be accessed by non-group members.

Recommended Use

We recommend that students working in groups, as part of a group assignment or a task involving group work, have access to these communication tools within their group.

Further information is available on the Blackboard Help page on Groups.

Send Email

The “Send Email” course tool enables you to send emails to different target audiences, from individual students and staff in your course, to students only, staff only, individual groups or all groups, without having to use Outlook. Replies to your emails will be sent to your Outlook Inbox. In time, this tool will be replaced by the messaging tool (see below).

Recommended Use

Students feel swamped and pressured by the number of emails they receive. Thus, we recommend that the “Send Email” tool is only used to send messages to specific groups e.g. individual groups or groups of staff.

Further information is available on the Blackboard Help page on Email.

Messages

Messages will eventually replace the “Send Email” tool. They are private and secure communications. You and your students can send messages to each other, multiple people, or the entire class. Messages remain inside MyAberdeen and are specific to the course or organisation. Currently, messaging has the look and feel of email but it never finds its way into your Outlook Inbox.

Students (and staff) can access their messages on the “Messages” page and in the “Activity Stream”. They can also edit their “Notifications” to receive messages immediately by email or in the Activity Stream.

Please note the Message feature is not available for External Examiners and therefore they will not be able to send or receive messages using this feature (however they can still view announcements).

Recommended Use

We recommend you use messaging to contact individual students or groups of students without having to clutter your Outlook email with course-specific communications.

Further information is available on the Blackboard Help page on Messages.