

Managing Text Messaging to Students Policy

This policy refers to all texting activity at the University of Brighton. The university maintains two specific tools, both of which are governed by this policy. The Connect Txt tool is used primarily by the Marketing and Communications department with other departments also utilising it, such as Student Services. The Schools have the ability to text students via the Connect for Learn tool, which is integrated within the University of Brighton's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), studentcentral (Blackboard Learn).

Departments and Schools that utilise either the Connect Txt tool or Connect for Learn tools are requested to abide by this policy. To use this channel for applications other than currently agreed they must seek approval from the Director of Marketing and Communications.

Background

Text messaging, also known as SMS, is an electronic form of communication. Written content is limited to 160 characters or less and are predominantly received on mobile phones and smart phones. Increasingly these messages may also be received on tablets and other forms of smart device.

The relevance of the Text Message format is realised as a valuable communication channel between the University of Brighton and its students due to the instantaneous nature of message receipt and therefore lends itself to specific time imperative messages. This can be viewed in comparison to emailed communications, which are checked less frequently by students and are therefore less effective tools for time-sensitive information.

Connect Txt has been in place at the university since 2013 and Connect for Learn was developed in 2015. Connect Txt requires a new data set to be uploaded each time it is used. The data can be accessed from the student record and uploaded, as such it is currently used centrally by Marketing and Communications, along with other defined service areas such as Student Services. Training and support for both systems is provided by the eLearning Team.

Connect for Learn operates directly within the VLE, using data passed from the student record system directly into studentcentral. From this interface school colleagues are able to text students directly from each course or module area to all those enrolled on each element.

The cost of each individual message is 7.5 pence per message and this is currently provided by a central fund within Information Services. This therefore represents the most expensive communications channel available to contact students and why the agreed uses below are key to managing the budget and integrity of the channel.

It is anticipated the introduction of this communication channel will allow the university to act in response to student feedback outlined in the National Student Survey (NSS) and Brighton Student Survey (BSS), where students have asked for this service, specifically around room changes, lecture reschedules and building closures.

From this point forth the University of Brighton's VLE shall be referred to as "studentcentral".

Identified uses of Texting:

The following table outlines the University approved uses for texting, who has authority to agree the use of texting within each school, who has authority to send it, which system to use and any other associated policies.

The role of Authoriser is to agree how each school or department will implement the policy within their area. The identified authoriser can state from implementation of the policy that all below approved uses are to be used in their area and therefore approve all texts within these remits; similarly they may decide they will not utilise texting at all.

Therefore the Authoriser role is not to approve individual messages but the remit by which this policy will be applied to each area of the university.

Purpose of the message	Authoriser for sending messages	Sender via this channel	Tool Used	Related Policies
Room changes and class rescheduling - to let groups of students know about room changes for their timetabled sessions or rescheduling of: classes, tutorial meetings or seminars	Head of School	School Offices, Course Administrators and Lecturers (or colleagues who have delegated authority*, anyone with delegation powers will need to have read the policy and understand guidance on the use of texting**)	Connect for Learn	
One off, Compulsory , Learning and Teaching based events that are not on timetables – this refers to events that are based around learning where they are not included in the timetable. NB: This is not a perfect situation as all L&T events should be on timetables, but where this is not possible texting could be used to support other communications as a last resort.	Head of School	School Offices, Course Administrators and Lecturers (or colleagues who have delegated authority*, anyone with delegation powers will need to have read the policy and understand guidance on the use of texting**)	Connect for Learn	
Pastoral messages – to remind students of session bookings, such as SSGTs or counselling appointments, attendance to focus groups, or SLTA sessions.	Head of School/Department	School Offices, Course Administrators and Lecturers (or colleagues who have delegated authority*, anyone with delegation powers will need to have read the policy and understand guidance on the use of texting**)	Connect for Learn and Connect Txt	

Placement messages – messages to placement student about visits or changes to visits	Head of School/Department	School Offices, Course Administrators and Lecturers (or colleagues who have delegated authority*, anyone with delegation powers will need to have read the policy and understand guidance on the use of texting**)	Connect for Learn	
Localised Emergency Messages – Such as lab closed due to chemical spill	Head of School/Department NB: Internal Communications should be informed that such a communication has been sent.	School Offices, Course Administrators and Lecturers (or colleagues who have delegated authority*, anyone with delegation powers will need to have read the policy and understand guidance on the use of texting**)	Connect for Learn	Emergency Communications Plan (Draft) and Business Continuity Plan. Current Health and Safety Policy
Global Emergency messages – such a campus wide closures	Director of Marketing and Communications upon confirmation of decision to close made by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC). If the DVC is unavailable, the decision will sit with the Registrar or Vice-Chancellor.	Internal Communications Team (or colleagues who have delegated authority*, anyone with delegation powers will need to have read the policy and understand guidance on the use of texting**)	ConnectTxT	Emergency Communications Plan (Draft) and Business Continuity Plan. Current Health and Safety Policy
University wide communications campaigns – such as the NSS and BSS or a meningitis outbreak.	Director of Marketing and Communications	Internal Communications Team (or colleagues who have delegated authority*, anyone with delegation powers will need to have read the policy and understand guidance on the use of texting**)	ConnectTxT	

* A full list of Designated Authorities can be found in Appendix Two

** Guidance can be found at: <https://staff.brighton.ac.uk/is/learningandteaching/Pages/studentcentral/Connecttxt-for-learn.aspx>

Each School/Department using either of the texting tools should identify a co-ordinator for the service. This role will be designated to monitor the use of text messages and ensure the policy is upheld by the school. As part of this role they must look to monitor the texts sent via their accounts and monitor that all are sent in accordance with the policy.

Internal Communications will administer and collect student feedback related to the use of texting for their area and use this to develop the channel and policy over time.

If a School/Department wish to use one of the services for a different purpose to those outlined above this will need authorisation from the Director of Marketing and Communications or member of staff with delegated authority.

Appropriate Message Format and Syntax

The guidelines below state the standardised message format and syntax for all text messaging at the university.

1. Format of message: the message must not exceed 160 characters in order to stay within the bounds of a single message. This character limit includes any stock text and identifiers.
2. Sender: all messages must identify the university. The message shall be identified as from the “UniBrighton” when received but should also be accompanied by some form of identifier, such as ‘UniBrighton’.
3. Message Author: the message author should be identified by the inclusion of initials at the end of the message. For example Jane Brown should be written as “(JB)”. This is in line with best practice, ensures the recipient knows a real person is behind the message and it is trackable by the university as to who has sent the message.
4. Where to obtain additional information: due to the character limit, it may be necessary to refer students to additional information.
 - a. Where used the full web address (URL) to the necessary site in the message itself as many mobile devices will allow direct access from the Text Message link to the website. This should be written as ‘see <https://www.brighton.ac.uk/current-students/>’
 - b. Do not use URL shorteners (e.g. Bit.ly or Goo.gl) as these pass user data through third-party services
 - c. In the case where a more detailed email is sent in addition to a Text Message, use the following: ‘check university email’
5. When requesting a meeting with individual students do not include the reason for the meeting in the message as other instructors will be able to access the content. Ensure that the text message is neutral and written in professional business language. Ask the student to arrange the meeting time/location via alternative communication e.g. email, phone.
6. Avoid colloquialisms and text speak vernacular:
 - a. Avoid non-latin characters.
 - b. Numbers: Spell out up to nine, after that use numbers; Six semesters, 10 modules.
 - c. Dates: Use 1 January 2016 (not January 1, 2016); use 1; 2; 3 (not 1st, 2nd, 3rd).
 - d. Do not use Text Speak: substitution of the “4” for “For”, or emoticon characters.

- e. Avoid “FYI” for “For Your Information” as it is redundant in this context.
- f. Do not include personal information such as personal phone numbers.

Sample messages can be found in Appendix 1.

Terms of Use

1. Students must be informed of the purpose of text messaging from the university via email and text message. This communication should be distributed at the beginning of the academic year, with a follow-up communication via email during Semester 2 for students who start in February. This will be the responsibility of the Internal Communications Team who will factor it into the welcome communications.
2. There will not be a function to allow replies to text messages and therefore use of texting must be for broadcast messages and not requiring a response. This should be achieved via another communication channel, such as email.
3. Students must be able to access information on the purpose of text messaging from a single information point. This should be linked into the mentioned communications above.
4. Students must be made aware of the *Connect Txt* and *Connect for Learn* sending number. The caller ID will be listed as “unibrighton”, the service centre number is +447958879835. This number is generic and is used by other text messaging services in the UK including some used by the NHS. There is no connection between these services and the University of Brighton text messaging service.
5. Text Messages must not be the only means by which the communication is sent – preferred routes are announcements on studentcentral for schools and email for central departments.
6. For central messages the Internal Communications Team will remain gatekeeper of the channel and any requests outside the stated messages above from schools or other departments will need to be signed off by the Director of Marketing and Communications or member of staff with delegated authority. As such the Internal Communications Team will be administrators on the ConnectTxT systems so as to monitor all messages sent and gather feedback on the service from users.
7. Mobile phone numbers for students will be stored within the student records system (SITS). Mobile phone numbers will not be accessible to individual staff. Mobile phone number data is stored in accordance with the data protection act 1998¹
8. Each School/Department must supply a named co-ordinator before the School/Department is allowed to utilise the texting channel.
9. Staff must have read the policy and understand the guidance before they can send SMS.

¹ <http://staff.brighton.ac.uk/reg/legal/policies/Data Protection Policy.pdf>

10. Departmental Co-ordinators are required to inform Internal Communications of changes to staff who are authorised to send SMS.

The roles and responsibilities for managing the system and this policy are outlined in Appendix 3.

Appendix 1: Examples of Text Messages

Example One: Room Change:

“UniBrighton – today’s EC222 Lecture will now be held in Mithras 228 at 2pm, check <https://studentcentral.brighton.ac.uk> for details of what to bring (KP)”

Example Two: Session Booking Reminder:

“UniBrighton – Reminder: Your appointment with Stuart Bullen (SSGT) is at 2pm tomorrow in Watts room 317 (SB)”

Example Three: Placement Visit Change:

“UniBrighton – Your placement officer will be visiting this Thursday, 4 November 2016 at 3.30pm. Please contact the office if you need to rearrange (EB)”

Example Four: Weather Closures:

“UniBrighton – The Falmer campus is closed today, Wednesday 5 December due to snow. See <https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/weatherupdates/> for updates (TA)”

Example Five: NSS Update

“UniBrighton – You have until midnight tonight to tell us what you think in the National Student Survey. Check your university email for the survey link (EH)”

Appendix 2: List of Designated Authorities

School or Department	Head of Department/School	Departmental/School Co-ordinator	Designated Senders
Brighton and Sussex Medical School	Malcolm Reed Dean of Brighton and Sussex Medical School	Pippa Robinson Deputy Medical School Secretary	Undergraduate Office; Lecturers
Brighton Business School	Aidan Berry Head of Brighton Business School	Sharon Blows School Admin Manager	School Office; Course Admins; Lecturers
Hastings Campus	Paul Frost Campus Director	Sarah Chapman Campus Infrastructure Development Officer	Campus Office; Lecturers
Marketing and Communications	Liz Sanz Director of Marketing and Communications	Ed Bending Student Engagement Officer (Channels)	Internal Communications Team
Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement	Sam Davies Director of Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement	Sarah Grant Alumni Communications Manager	Alumni Communications Manager
School of Applied Social Science	Kate Bullen Head of School of Applied Social Science	Becky Farmer School Admin Manager	School Office; Course Admins; Lecturers
School of Architecture and Design	Robert Mull Head of School of Architecture and Design		School Office; Course Admins; Lecturers
School of Art	Amanda Bright Head of School of Art	Amy Etheridge School Admin Manager	School Office; Course Admins; Lecturers
School of Computing, Engineering and Mathematics	John Taylor Head of School of Computing, Engineering and Mathematics	Rachel Clarke School Admin Manager	School Office; Course Admins; Lecturers
School of Education	John Smith Head of School of Education	Vicki May Deputy School Admin Manager	School Office; Course Admins; Lecturers

School of Environment and Technology	Kirsty Smallbone Head of School of Environment and Technology	Imran Rafik Deputy Head of School (Quality Enhancement and Assurance)	School Office; Course Admins; Lecturers
School of Health Sciences	Paula Kersten Head of School of Health Sciences	Emily Hastings and Emily Crozier School Admin Officer	School Office; Course Admins; Lecturers
School of Humanities	Paddy Maguire Head of School of Humanities	Mel Searle School Admin Manager	School Office; Course Admins; Lecturers
School of Media	Helen Kennedy Head of School of Media	Holger Zchenderlein Principal Lecturer, Media	School Office; Course Admins; Lecturers
School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences	David Timson Head of School of Pharmacy and Biomolecular Sciences	Sue Johnson School Administration Manager	School Office; Course Admins; Lecturers
School of Sport and Service Management	Jo Doust Head of School of Sport and Service Management	Samantha Houston Deputy School Administration Manager	School Office; Course Admins; Lecturers
Student Services	Karen Jackson Director of Student Services	Rachel Page Student Services Information Manager	SSGTs; Councillors; Career Advisors; Front of House Staff

Appendix 3: Management Responsibilities

Information Services will...	Marketing and Communications will...	Department and Schools will...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operationally manage the system, dealing with technical matters and resolving any issues through their standard working practices. • Ensure that credits are available for the system and manage the payment of these. • Make data available to those managing the service • Produce training and guidance documents for those using the system and provide relevant degrees of training when requested. • Support with the overall development of the channel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit the output of the service to students, monitoring the upkeep of the policy. • Communicate any variances against the policy to the school/department of sender and remind them of the policy. • Update the policy as new uses are approved by the Director of Marketing and Communications • Update the list of delegated authorisers, school/department co-ordinators and senders. • Support with the overall development of the channel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a school/department co-ordinator for the service to ensure the school adheres to the policy. • Inform changes to the co-ordinator role to Internal Communications. • Respond to breaches in the policy and communicate the issues with senders to ensure it doesn't occur again. • Support dissemination of policy and guidance within the school.