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Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board

Communications Policy

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1. Introduction

Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB) is committed to facilitating excellent internal and external communications among staff, learners, students and the general public.

Communications should be open, appropriate to the audience, clear, concise, constructive, informative and timely. It is important that information is disseminated in a consistent manner across all channels.

This policy should be read in conjunction with all other relevant LWETB policies, circulars and legislation, including but not limited to ICT And Data Protection Policies.

2. Scope of Policy

This policy applies to all manner of communications issued or engaged in by LWETB staff, both internally and externally, relating to activities or issues concerning LWETB. This policy applies to LWETB employees at all levels, throughout the organisation.

3. Purpose and Aims

The purpose of this policy is to outline the procedures for managing communications in order to:

- Ensure a clear understanding and awareness LWETB's activities
- Share successes and learning opportunities within the organisation
- Proactively and consistently engage, collaborate and consult with stakeholders, both internal and external, in a timely manner
- Develop a clear brand considering the longer term view and the wider context
- Communicate organisational changes effectively
- Mitigate reputational risks

This policy should be read in conjunction with the [LWETB Communications Toolkit](#).

4. Responsibilities

The Chief Executive (CE) and/or LWETB Communications Officer are ultimately responsible for all types of communication on behalf of LWETB.

All staff are responsible for ensuring effective communication with colleagues.

In order to support efficient and effective communication, a range of protocols are available in [LWETB Communications Toolkit](#) such as the LWETB Employee protocol for dealing with the Press or Media Protocol, LWETB Event Protocol and LWETB Corporate Branding Usage Guidelines.

5. Policy

5.1 Content of Communications

Communications issued on behalf of LWETB must adhere to the following principles:

- Must not be defamatory or incur liability for LWETB
- Must not contain inappropriate content, offensive material or material that could damage LWETB's image or reputation:
Inappropriate content / offensive material includes, but is not limited to, pornography, racial or religious slurs, gender-specific comments, information encouraging criminal skills or terrorism, or materials relating to cults, gambling and illegal drugs. This definition of inappropriate content or material also covers any text, images or other media that could reasonably be regarded as offensive on the basis of race, age, sex, religious or political beliefs, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, or any other characteristics protected by law
- Must not involve unsolicited views on social, political, religious or other non-business related matters
- Must not disclose sensitive or confidential information without authorisation.

5.2 Communicating sensitive information

Staff must exercise caution when handling sensitive information with regard to how and whom the information is communicated. Sensitive data includes but is not limited to: information pertaining to an individual's race, colour, sexual orientation, religion, political opinions, membership of a trade union, criminal record and includes medical information in relation to employees, students, learners and information regarding financial and commercially sensitive matters relating to the business of LWETB.

Please note:

- All documents should be stored securely and in line with LWETB Records Management Policy.
- Laptops and mobile devices should not be left unattended or unlocked when not in use.
- Computer screens should be locked, and password protected when left unattended.
- Computer screens should be positioned out of view of members of the public.
- General discussion regarding students and other LWETB business should not take place in an open forum or in a public place, including in the reception area of LWETB offices.
- In transmitting information via email, particular attention should be paid to ensuring that correct email addresses are used.
- Password protection and encryption, where available, should be utilised.

5.3 Data Protection

The General Data Protection (GDPR) and Regulation EU 2016/679 and the Data Protection Acts 1998-2018 applies to the processing of personal data. Both laws apply to organisations who collect, hold and use personal data, and provide protection for the people whose data it is.

An understanding of relevant legislation surrounding data protection will be made known to the employees to reduce the likelihood of a data breach occurring during the employee's initial work period. LWETB's Data Protection Department.

5.4 Equal Access

LWETB is committed to ensuring equal access to information for all users, including those with disabilities. Communications should be provided in accessible formats and in compliance with relevant legislation. Section 28 of the Disability Act 2005 stipulates, inter alia, that:

- Communications by a public body to a person with a hearing or visual impairment must, as far as practicable, be provided in an accessible format, following a request. Information provided electronically must, as far as practicable, be compatible with adaptive technology. Published information relevant to persons with intellectual disabilities, must be made available in easy to read formats.
- Under the Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021, public bodies have a duty to ensure that stationery, signage and recorded oral announcements are provided in Irish or bilingually, and any correspondence by post or email sent in Irish will be replied to in Irish.

5.5 Official Languages (Amendment) Act 2021

Since its inception in 2003, that Act mandates that all information disseminated to the public, encompassing general and targeted marketing materials, must be provided in both Irish and English.

Furthermore public bodies are required to respond to emails and letters in the language (Irish or English) in which they were received. With the ongoing digitalisation of communications recent amendments to the legislation extends this requirement to social media communications also, ensuring consistent implementation across all platforms.

An LWETB Communications Toolkit has been developed, incorporating documents such as LWETB Event Protocol, LWETB Media Protocol and LWETB Corporate Branding Usage Guidelines. The toolkit is available [here](#). This toolkit aims to assist staff in adhering to the standardisation of communication practices within LWETB.

In line with the recommendations of the National Adult Literacy Association (NALA), communications materials should prioritise adherence to plain English guidelines. A copy of the NALA Plain English guidelines can be found [here](#).

5.6 Protocols for Communications Channels

Staff are required to adhere to the recommended protocols so that uniformity of practice may be achieved across LWETB.

Standards and recommended best practice for particular channels of communication are outlined below and should be read in conjunction with this policy and the LWETB Communications Toolkit [here](#).

Further information will be provided through CPD training and guidelines as appropriate.

a) Use of SharePoint

Microsoft 365, and SharePoint is the preferred method of communication. Training and guidelines on its use are ongoing however if you have a specific training request in relation to these platforms, please reach out to hsw@lwetb.ie giving a brief outline of the training required.

b) Incoming Communications

Staff should familiarise themselves with the procedures for handling outgoing and incoming mail relevant to their office. The following are the general procedures for the handling of mail and deliveries:

- Mail, whether received by post or hand-delivered, must be date stamped with the date of receipt, on the top right hand corner of each document.
- Mail received by post must be appropriately recorded.
- Out-going mail must be appropriately recorded.
- Mail received must be circulated to recipients on the day it is received,
- Receipt of deliveries and large items will be notified to the intended recipient via email. Such items should be collected as soon as possible to ensure that the reception area is kept clear and presentable.

c) Publications, Promotional Material and Public Relations

All LWETB external and internal correspondence, publications, leaflets, posters and online content should be professional, clear, accurate, and accessible and follow the agreed formats as outlined in the LWETB Communications Toolkit [here](#).

Guidelines for logos other than LWETB logos (e.g. funding agencies) which may be used by LWETB should be adhered to. Please contact the LWETB Communications team by emailing communications@lwetb.ie if you are unsure of the relevant logo requirements.

All publications should be approved by the relevant line manager and be proofread thoroughly prior to issue so as to ensure they contain accurate information and Adhere to LWETB guidelines.

Permission for use of LWETB name or logo by a third party for publication may only be given by the Chief Executive or the Communications Officer.

Where the production of printed material, advertisements or other forms of literature is necessary, staff must ensure that the [LWETB Procurement Policy](#) is adhered to in full. The placement of media advertisements is also subject to public procurement procedures.

d) Communication with the Media

Queries from the media should be directed to the designated Communications Officer in line with the LWETB Employee Protocol for dealing with the Press or Media. No comment or response should be provided to a media query without being issued to the or prior review by the Chief Executive.

e) Website/Social Media Pages

The LWETB website, the websites of LWETB schools, centres and services, and their social media platforms are important means of communicating information about LWETB.

Staff should monitor posted information under their control to ensure that outdated or inaccurate information on the website and social media platforms is replaced with updated information as soon as it is available.

Permission for the establishment of additional websites and social media pages should be sought and obtained from the designated Communications Officer prior to the establishment of such resources.

Websites and Social media posts must be produced bilingually in line with the [Official Languages \(Amendment\) Act 2021](#).

5.7 Email Usage

All staff members are provided with an individual LWETB email account, and this account should be used for LWETB related business only.

LWETB business should not be transacted through other non-approved email services (e.g. Gmail etc.).

Emails are subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2014 and the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003.

5.8 Copyright

LWETB should respect and operate within copyright legislation.

5.9 Compliance

Contraventions of this policy may lead to disciplinary action. Unauthorised or inappropriate use of LWETB communications channels may lead to disciplinary action or criminal prosecution.

- LWETB’s ICT and internet resources, including computers, smart phones, and internet connections, are provided for legitimate business use only.
- LWETB reserves the right to monitor how communication tools are used and accessed through these resources.
- Any such examinations or monitoring will only be carried out by authorised users.
- Additionally, all data relating to social networks written, sent or received through LWETB computer systems is part of official LWETB records.
- LWETB is legally compelled to show that information to law enforcement agencies or other parties on request.
- LWETB reserves the right to retract a communication if it is deemed to be inappropriate or offensive.



6 Responsibilities

Owner	Responsibilities
Director of Organisational Support & Development	Revisions and updates to the policy
LWETB Management Team	Review of the Policy
LWETB Chief Executive	Approval of the Policy
Data Owners	Ensuring implementation of policy

7 Review and Implementation

This policy will be reviewed every three years by the Senior Management Team in line with best practice, or in light of changes in legislation and guidance from sources such as Internal Audit, C&AG, the Department of Education the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform, or on the issuing of circular letter or by the Chief Executive in response to business needs. The date of implementation is the date of Chief Executive approval.

8 Ownership and Authorisation

OWNER	DATE	SIGNATURE
<i>Organisation Support & Development Director</i>	Sep 12, 2024	 Charlie Mitchell (Sep 12, 2024 14:56 GMT+1)
AUTHORISED BY	DATE	SIGNATURE
<i>Chief Executive</i>	Sep 12, 2024	 Liz Lavery (Sep 12, 2024 22:10 GMT+1)