

## 1. Introduction

E-mail and other digital forms of communication such as messaging, texting etc, are often used, both internally and externally, as a substitute for conversation. It can be quicker, cheaper and sometimes easier than trying to reach someone by phone.

In that conversational use it is easy to overlook that verbal conversations are selective, informal and not recorded. E-mails, either by accident or by design, may be none of these. They are easily distributed to an audience wider than that intended, can amount to legal documents and are at least potentially in permanent form.

Suffolk Artlink has a number of concerns in respect of the potential dangers of communicating digitally and use of the Internet. It is therefore appropriate that it has a policy applicable to all its employees (paid and unpaid) who use digital communications so that everyone is aware of the procedures to be used in respect of it and other internet applications.

## 2. The Policy

Suffolk Artlink expects that staff (paid and unpaid) will not use phones, the e-mail system, other digital communications or internet access to store, display, generate and/or pass on to others material whether in text, pictures or any other form which may be regarded offensive on the grounds of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, disability, age or any other grounds. Suffolk Artlink understands that it is not always practicable to control the flow of such material inwards from external e-mail users, but this does not take away the responsibility of internal users for any such material they store or pass on.

In particular, Suffolk Artlink will not accept as an excuse for the distribution of offensive material that the employee was not aware that it was attached to the message forwarded.

The question of what constitutes offensive material is not one for the sender to determine – it is the effect on the recipient which is important. You must not therefore pass on any material which risks causing offence to any recipient. Whether or not you intend to cause offence and whether or not you yourself find the material offensive is irrelevant.

If you generate and/or pass on e-mails or other messages to other users you must be very clear as to the intended recipient. The inadvertent dispatch of material to a collective user group, for example, is no different from sending it individually to all those within that group.

Individual staff (paid and unpaid) are fully responsible for their own phone, PC or laptop computer and must take every reasonable precaution to avoid risk of abuse of their computer, e.g. for users of laptops used out of the office using password security and logging off (if switching off is not practicable) before leaving their laptop unattended. Otherwise Suffolk Artlink must assume in the first instance that any material accessed or coming from or via your terminal was accessed, generated and/or passed on by you. For the same reason you should not reveal your e-mail log on code to any person.

Though e-mail and texts (whether internal or external) may sometimes be a substitute for conversation, it has to be remembered that things look different written down from the way they would sound when spoken and in context. Therefore, Suffolk Artlink encourages staff not to use e-mail whilst in a bad temper! Suffolk Artlink expects all e-mails to be written in a civil, professional and as far as possible, amicable tone, just as it expects staff to adhere to those principles in conversation and in paper correspondence. This is particularly important for those with management responsibilities; Suffolk Artlink will not tolerate bullying by e-mail or “flame-mail”. The use of obscene language or swear words is prohibited.

For your own protection and that of Suffolk Artlink you must not use the e-mail or any other digital form of communication to distribute or pass on any material which is actually or potentially defamatory of any person, firm, or company, whether or not connected with Suffolk Artlink. Jokes at the expense of named or identifiable others are included within this prohibition.

If material confidential to Suffolk Artlink or certain people within it is being communicated internally or externally by e-mail

you should take extra care to ensure that the e-mail or any other digital form of communication reaches only recipients who have a right to see that information. Consider, given the lack of secrecy inherent within e-mail system and other digital forms of communication, whether it would be preferable to use an alternative means of communication.

It is tempting to use "shorthand" grammar when compiling e-mails. Suffolk Artlink encourages correct sentence construction and punctuation to be used, as well as correct and respectful forms of address. Suffolk Artlink expects e-mail users to maintain efficient filing, regularly cleaning out unwanted and time-lapsed messages.

As with all other business correspondence e-mails and other digital forms of communication are disclosable in the course of legal proceedings if they are relevant to the issues raised in those proceedings. It is therefore particularly important that sensitive matters which could be construed as being relevant to any potential proceedings should not be discussed by e-mail. It may be more appropriate to discuss them during a meeting instead. As e-mails and other digital forms of communication are potentially discoverable documents you should be conscious of the fact that by forwarding an e-mail or other digital forms of communication, you may very often refer to earlier correspondence or indeed forward that earlier correspondence attached. Consequently, sensitive matters can be spread exponentially contrary to your original intention.

If conducting dealings with outside companies, suppliers etc. by e-mail and other digital forms of communication, remember that you could inadvertently create a binding contract with that third party. You should only deal with third parties by e-mail or other digital forms of communication, if your job requires it. Suffolk Artlink expects figures to be typed both in words and numbers so as to avoid expensive clerical errors. Check business e-mails before despatch as carefully as you would check a written contract containing the same matters.

Use of the e-mail system to copy and/or transmit any documents, software or other information protected by the copyright laws is prohibited.

E-mail is one of the most likely points of access of a virus into computer systems. Attached files and programmes can contain viruses and users should always take care about opening attachments within e-mails, especially those received from external sources.

Overall Suffolk Artlink's requirement is that you do not by e-mail or other digital forms of communication, generate, display, distribute or pass on any material any part of which, from timing down to punctuation, you would not be prepared to justify in Court. The misuse of e-mail and Internet access systems, deliberate or inadvertent, will be treated as a serious disciplinary matter. In the most serious of cases, breach of these procedures could lead to your prosecution and/or dismissal.

### **3. Verification**

Effectiveness of this policy will be evaluated annually by the Suffolk Artlink Directors through analysis of any issues arising from any transgressions.

### **4. Revision History**

The policy will be reviewed triennially by the Suffolk Artlink Board.

<b>Date Adopted</b>	<b>Dates amended</b>
Sep 11	September 2012
September 2013	
22 September 2014	
14 November 2016	
March 2018	
27 July 2021	27 July 2021