13.1 Expectations for Digital Communication

The department and NSW Teachers Federation jointly developed the *Expectations for Digital Communication Procedure* (the Procedure) to allow teachers to neither send nor respond to non-emergency work-related messages outside of school operating hours. The expectations are underpinned by four core principles:

1. *Safeguard employee wellbeing*
2. *Demonstrate leadership in promoting expectations for digital communication*
3. *Context matters*
4. *Promote respectful workplaces and communities.*

13.1.1 Purpose

The Procedure sets the department's expectations regarding communications sent to teachers in their personal downtime. The purpose is to help protect against burnout, to support a healthy work-life balance, and to protect against the psychosocial hazards.

The Digital communication principles are designed to work alongside and complement industrial and employment conditions, health and safety commitments and other department policies and procedures, such as the *Plan for NSW Public Education* (the Plan). Employee wellbeing is a critical element of the Plan, and all staff are expected to align to the objectives and initiatives contained in the Expectations for Digital Communication.

13.1.2 Applicability

The Procedure applies to teachers. But all employees must adjust their work-related communication practices in line with the digital communication principles.

13.1.3 Roles and responsibilities

All staff have a role in the successful application and adoption of the Procedure. Role specific responsibilities enable individual accountability in line with the digital communication principles.

a) Employees
   i. adjust individual work-related communication practices to protect and respect their own and their colleagues' rest periods, in line with the digital communication principles.

b) Principals and people leaders
   i. Establish, promote and maintain communication expectations and practices for teachers, parents, carers and communities, in line with the digital communication principles.

c) The department
   i. Actively promotes and protects employees from digital communication interruptions outside of school operating hours.
   ii. Takes active steps to limit digital communication sent out of school operating hours to emergency communication only.
   iii. ensures leaders, including school executive leaders take appropriate action to implement the digital communication principles, practices and culture and all teachers and leaders are committed to implementing the expectations for digital communication.

13.1.4 Four Principles

Under the Procedure, the process is governed by four core principles that provide a framework of rules and guidelines to best implement the department's commitment to workload balance and staff wellbeing:

1. *Safeguard employee wellbeing*

   Individuals, leaders and teams, including educational support teams must:

   - take active steps to ensure their personal, team and community communication practices support employee wellbeing and follow the digital communication principles
   - ensure teachers know that it's time to 'switch off' from work-related communications outside of school operating hours to help maintain a healthy work-life balance and protect against the psychosocial hazards of always being connected to work.

2. *Demonstrate leadership in promoting expectations for digital communication*

The department, executive directors, director educational leadership, principals, and other executive and school leaders should not send non-urgent emails or other messages outside of school operating hours.

Principals and managers must:

- lead the way, show what is possible and visibly demonstrate how they disconnect from working
- enable, encourage and support a guilt-free disconnection for their employees outside of school operating hours
- work with their teams (or for schools) to consult with their teachers when making decisions related to setting clear communication expectations and embedding supportive ways of working.

Principals must promote, communicate and provide clear boundaries for school communities around respectful and considerate communication. This includes promoting to parents, carers and communities the department's commitment to protecting employees from digital communication interruptions outside of school operating hours, acknowledging parents' needs to communicate with their child's schools, principals and teachers.at appropriate times for them. Schools will indicate a preferred channel of communication for school communities so that important messages aren't overlooked and the volume of messages can be streamlined.

3. *Context matters*

   Employees may need to be contacted outside of regular working hours to assist with critical situations or emergencies.

   'School operating hours' may be different for different contexts, positions, roles and employee types across the department.

4. *Respectful workplaces and communities*

   Employees must:

   - contribute to a culture of considerate communication and understand the importance of respecting their own and their colleagues' time to switch off
   - where they choose to work outside of school operating hours, they must respect their colleagues' rest time, and alter their communication to limit communication intrusions on their colleagues unless there is an emergency or a prior agreement
   - where colleagues, parents and members of the community send non-emergency communication to employees outside of their school operating hours, employees are encouraged and supported to not respond until they resume their school working hours.

The department trusts teachers, as professionals, to manage their school work without unnecessary interruptions or the need to immediately respond to questions. It is up to the individual whether they choose to read and respond emails, apps, calls, texts or other non-emergency communication outside of school operating hours.

13.1.5 Exceptions

a) Exceptions to this procedure may include critical communications or emergent situations, including:
   i. notifications of misadventure
   ii. natural disasters
   iii. utility emergencies impacting school operations
   iv. serious student or employee health, safety and wellbeing issues
   v. urgent issues impacting an employee's salary payment or conditions, urgent leave and staffing matters.

b) The Procedure does not prevent staff from making exceptions by prior agreement outside of regular working hours, such as if you have an arrangement in place around a specific student or have a set time where you are available to answer questions.

13.1.5 Source information

a) The Procedure is contained in the Department's Policy library and should be relied upon as the source of truth for future updates. Reference PD-2024-0485-10.