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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to your guide to team briefing at the University of Exeter. The following document contains everything you need to engage in the team briefing process - whether you are a manager with a responsibility for delivering a team brief, or a member of a team taking part in a briefing session.

While these guidelines try to cover most points, there may be issues relevant to your area of work, or specific responsibility as a manager, which are not covered here. If you feel you need further information or advice, in the first instance, you should approach your line manager.

If you have any general questions about the team briefing process or any of the other points raised in this guide, then please contact the internal communications team:

internalcomms@exeter.ac.uk

WHAT IS TEAM BRIEFING?

In simple terms, team briefing brings managers together with their teams on a face-to-face basis so that information can be delivered, questions asked and feedback collected. A team briefing system is an excellent way to enable communication upwards, downwards and sideways throughout an organisation.

Research has shown that face-to-face communication between managers and their teams is vital to the efficient and effective operation of an organisation. The University of Exeter is a large and complex organisation with a number of employees working on varied patterns, a proportion of whom do not have regular access to a computer, so face-to-face communication is essential in this environment.

The findings of the University's 2014 Employee Engagement Survey showed that employees wanted to be more involved and better informed about key decisions.

Team briefing is an ideal tool to use to respond to this feedback as team briefing is not just about giving information, it's about creating a forum where employees can come together in their teams to discuss the points being raised and to ask questions; and for their feedback to be recorded and relayed back up the organisation to the appropriate management levels.

Team briefing is also an ideal forum for sharing good news and recognising and celebrating your achievements as a team.

Everyone acknowledges that face-to-face contact can sometimes be difficult. If you are a manager you may think you don't have time to bring your

colleagues together, or the news that you may have to give your team may be difficult to deliver. But neither of these should discourage you from talking face-to-face with the people you manage.

Team briefing will only work if everyone involved in the process is committed to making it work. If you are a manager with a responsibility to deliver a team brief then it is your job to make sure that everyone within your team fully understands what team briefing is about and why they are taking part in the process. If you are a recipient of a team briefing, your role is to listen, ask questions and give constructive feedback.

THE BENEFITS OF TEAM BRIEFING

Team briefing provides:

- A channel for delivering clear messages and encouraging open communication
- Timely face-to-face communication which prevents rumour and the grapevine from gaining credibility
- A great form of two-way communication - it's not just about informing people, but listening and responding to questions and concerns
- Employees with an opportunity to ask questions and for suggestions to be fed back from employees to the top
- A greater awareness of organisational issues and involvement at all levels
- A shared sense of mission, vision, collective aims and reasons about why we're working here
- The ability to reduce misunderstanding within your team and within other parts of the University

- Employees with up to date information on performance, results, progress and policy changes

THE TEAM BRIEFING PROCESS

The Team Brief will be produced in September, October, November, January, February, March*, May and June (not December, April*, July or August). The written Team Brief will be circulated to all employees via email on the dates outlined in the [Team Brief calendar](#). The key messages will then be cascaded by members of VCEG to Academic and Professional Services leaders at the pre-planned senior leadership team meetings.

*Depending upon when Easter falls Team Brief will either be produced in March or April.

The cascade of messages from VCEG to Academic and Professional Services leaders will mark the start of the verbal cascade process. Once Academic and Professional Services leaders have received their briefing from VCEG, they will then be in a position to deliver their own team briefing to their team of direct reports. This team briefing should include the points from the Team Brief (around 30% of the content of the briefing), with the majority of the briefing consisting of local information i.e. information relating to each specific function/area/team.

The cascade of briefings should continue down all relevant levels of management until all teams have received a face-to-face team briefing. The cascade will look and feel very different in each part of University. In some areas the cascade will be very short, while in others it may feature many different management and supervisory levels.

Academic and Professional Services leaders, and members of their senior teams, will be given the flexibility to arrange their own cascade processes. This will enable them to make use of existing college/service meetings. However, all employees should receive a verbal team briefing within two to three weeks of the Team Brief being cascaded.

If you are a manager/supervisor and are unsure whether you have a responsibility for delivering a team briefing, please discuss this with your line manager. This will ensure that the correct cascade of information is established from the outset.

In addition to the written Team Brief, the Vice-Chancellor will hold 'all staff' talks every term, the Registrar will hold talks for Professional Services colleagues twice a year and the Provost will discuss topics with Academics by regularly attending College meetings.

GUIDELINES FOR MANAGERS WHO ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR DELIVERING A TEAM BRIEF

The first thing to do is establish whether you are responsible for delivering a briefing to your team. This will depend upon the size of your team and the management structure within the area in which you work. If you are in any doubt as to whether you should be delivering a team briefing, then clarify this with your line manager as soon as possible.

Once you have established whether you are responsible for delivering a team briefing, make sure you know exactly who you are supposed to include in your briefing. Remember when holding your first team briefing meeting to explain to your team why you have called the briefing and what they can expect.

Being able to effectively communicate with your team is a fundamental part of any management role and is an integral part of all the management development courses offered by the University. To find the best course for you please visit the [training and development webpages](#).

The following points will help you to prepare for a team briefing.

i) ARRANGING YOUR TEAM BRIEFING

Timing

First of all make yourself familiar with the team briefing calendar and, given the existing meetings you have with your team, work out when will be the best time to deliver your brief to your team. You may need to discuss this with your line manager to ensure that the correct cascade mechanism is in place.

Once the cascade has been agreed, you should set a series of dates for your team briefings - try setting dates in advance so your teams can put them into their diaries. It may be convenient to run the team briefing at an existing monthly team meeting. If this is the case, you will need to ensure team briefing is placed on the agenda for this meeting and enough time is allocated so employees have time to share their views. When choosing dates you should try to aim for a day when most of your team is around - take into consideration those who may work part-time or shifts/rotas.

Size

The ideal team briefing is made up of around 4-20 people. If you are responsible for large numbers of employees then it may make sense to identify supervisors/managers/deputies within your team who could deliver team briefing meetings to smaller groups of employees. If you're in doubt about the best way to approach this then speak to your line manager for guidance.

Venue

Make sure you choose a suitable venue for your team briefing. Take into consideration the number of people who will be involved in the briefing and any access requirements your team may have.

Publicising the briefings

Once you've got all the arrangements in place make sure that you give your team enough notice so that they are able to attend. Make sure everyone knows where the venue is. If you've set dates for a few months in advance it's worth letting

people know about the dates all at once so that they can plan ahead.

ii) THE AGENDA

The most important thing to remember is that no more than 30% of the content of your team briefing should be made up of items on the written Team Brief. The majority of your briefing needs to be made up of items of news from your own local area of work. The following section '[Preparing the Local Brief](#)' will tell you more about the kind of items to include.

As with all meetings, it's best to put in some preparation beforehand. This might mean writing yourself an agenda so that you know which items you'll be talking about. Remember you will be delivering your brief verbally so you want it to sound natural - not scripted. You could try writing headings and elaborating with a few key points under each heading - just to remind you what messages you want to get across.

Priorities

Look at the brief through your team's eyes. Once you've decided what you want to talk about sort the items into:

- Must know information - details essential to the team and its day to day activities
- Should know information - details which your team should know about as a matter of course
- Nice to know information - information which might not directly affect the day to day work of your team but would still be useful to know about.

Sequence

Are there any logical links between the various items on the brief? If so, put the agenda into the order which suits this. This will help you in your delivery.

Timing

Work out roughly how long each item should take and make a note of this on your agenda so that you can keep an eye on the time as you work through the briefing. Remember to allow time for questions after each item.

iii) PREPARING THE LOCAL BRIEF

The briefing which you deliver to your team should be made up of two elements - the information contained in the written Team Brief from VCEG (no more than 30% of your briefing) and a local brief with information relevant to your own area of work.

The Team Brief

Your manager will go through the key messages in the Team Brief which will have been generated by VCEG. The Team Brief will contain items which may be of operational or strategic importance to the University as a whole.

You should deliver this information to your team as part of your team briefing, however the information from the written Team Brief should only make up around 30% of your team briefing as a whole. Where possible you should try to make the information contained within the written Team Brief as relevant to your team as possible. If the information in the written Team Brief is not relevant to your area of work then just mention it but do not dwell on it.

The Local Brief

Here are some pointers to get you thinking about the kind of things to include in your local brief. A good way to think about your brief is to split it up into the four Ps:

People

Promotions/retirements/leavers
Appointments
Visitors
Success stories
Changed locations/functions

Points for Action

New and on-going projects/activities
Special events
Health and Safety issues
Building works
Work standards
Upcoming deadlines

Progress

Performance against key indicators
Income generation ideas
Quality issues
Completed projects/activities

Policy Issues

Human Resources policies
Recruitment and Retention policies
Health and Safety policy

If, after looking at the above points, you really can't think of much local information to share with your team then simply hold a shorter team briefing meeting. It's better to deal with just one issue fully than speculate about several issues you know little about.

Good news

Don't forget to include good news and achievements.

Context

Briefers must always remember, and if necessary remind those they are briefing, that the object of the exercise is to provide information. Briefings are not designed for consultation or negotiation.

Anticipating questions

Remember that your team briefing is as much an opportunity for your team to ask questions as it is for you to give them information. When you've decided upon your list of items try to think about the kind of questions your team could ask. Put yourself in their shoes and try to anticipate their concerns. This will help you to prepare some answers in advance.

iv) PRESENTING THE BRIEF

Remember you will be delivering your brief face-to-face, so you should give some thought to how you come across to your team.

Briefings should be fairly informal and by all means adopt an approach which best suits the culture and nature of your team. Even though you will have put some thought and effort into preparing your briefing, try not to script what you want to say - it will just come across as unnatural and you may be thrown off course if someone asks a question.

What you should do however is make sure the style of your briefing is pretty consistent so that your team come to know what to expect and what their role is in the briefing.

A typical briefing might look like this:

TEAM BRIEF GUIDELINES

- Announce the beginning of the briefing
- Note taken of any absentees
- The briefer goes through the items on the brief – both the written Team Brief and local brief
- Questions arising out of the brief are asked and answered
- The briefer refers to any significant anticipated questions that have not been asked
- Make a note of any questions raised which you haven't been able to answer so these can be shared with your manager
- Remind the group of the date of the next meeting

Try to be:

Clear – avoid unfamiliar technicalities, acronyms, names

Brief – don't ramble, sometimes you should repeat the message to make sure it sinks in, but do it concisely

Interesting – create interest by using examples that the group will recognise

In control – arrange the group so you are its focus. Watch the reaction you are getting as you go along

Positive – remember that as a manager it is your responsibility to communicate decisions to your team regardless of your own personal views, so don't try to distance yourself from the brief.

Wherever possible ensure you have knowledge about the reasons which lie behind the information you are giving out.

use the form in [Appendix Two – Recording Feedback](#) to help you with this.

This is especially important if you were asked a question and couldn't provide a full answer at the time. Make a record of these questions and ensure that you follow them up and get back to the team.

You should try to get back to your team with an answer within ten working days of the brief taking place. If your team briefings are to work successfully it's essential that you get back to your team with answers to their questions, otherwise they may start to lose faith in the whole process.

Inform your line manager

It's important that you give the feedback you receive to your line manager so that they can feed any points they feel are relevant back up the management chain to senior levels if appropriate. Alternatively, you can share your feedback with the internal communications team: internalcomms@exeter.ac.uk who will collate this information and share it with VCEG.

FEEDBACK AND FOLLOW-UP

If you are a manager with a responsibility for delivering a team briefing, as soon as you have completed the briefing there are some simple but vital steps which you must take with regards to feedback and follow up.

These include:

Records of notes

If you have taken any notes during the briefing then file them appropriately. You can use the form in [Appendix One - Recording of Notes](#) to help you. This may help you when you come to prepare your next briefing.

What to do with feedback

All being well, your team should have given you some feedback and suggestions about the items you've been discussing. Make a note of the questions/ideas which came up at the meeting and put these with your briefing notes. You can

Responses to the feedback given will be highlighted in the next written Team Brief.

It's worth getting into the habit of using the feedback form to produce a short outline of any feedback which you can then deliver to your line manager soon after the briefing meeting so the information is fresh in your mind. You can also share with your manager how you felt the briefing went and what the level of interest was.

Make sure you do your follow up quickly

If you do this simple follow up within an hour of two of the briefing it will take you perhaps ten minutes. If you leave it a week the chances are you won't be able to do it at all.

GUIDELINES FOR THOSE RECEIVING A TEAM BRIEFING

Whatever your role within the University, or your level of seniority, you will at some point be a recipient of a team briefing. Some recipients will of course also be in a position where they will have to deliver a team briefing from the information they themselves are receiving.

Before you attend your team briefing, take a few minutes to think about the following points:

Before the briefing:

Do you know who will brief you?

Do you know when your team briefing will be taking place?

How long will the meeting take?

Do you know where the team briefing will take place?

Are you expected to do any preparation/bring anything with you to the meeting?

Look through the records of the last brief you received – are there any items still outstanding?

Are you having problems with the mechanics of the team briefing which you'd like to raise with your manager/colleagues?

At the briefing:

Concentrate and listen so that you hear the brief and the questions asked by other people

Make concise notes

Ask questions to clarify the information you have been given

If you're expected to deliver a team briefing to your own team make sure you understand which points are of particular relevance to your area of work.

By the end of the briefing you should have:

A clear picture of the information you have received. An idea of when you can expect to receive more information from your manager if they weren't able to answer your question there and then at the briefing.

MONITORING THE TEAM BRIEFING PROCESS

It's important that the team briefing system is monitored to ensure that it is working effectively. Managers at a senior level should make every effort to 'sit in' on team briefings within their area of work from time to time to assess how successful team briefing is.

The Internal Communications team will also seek to assess the effectiveness of the team briefing process.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How often should I hold a team briefing?

Team briefing meetings need to be held on a planned and regular basis. If you are a manager who will be delivering a Team Brief make sure that you are aware of the team briefing calendar and plan your team briefing meetings around this, in discussion with your line manager or fellow managers. It could be that the Team Brief becomes an agenda item on a regularly planned team or operational meeting.

How long should my team briefing last?

Your briefing should last around 15-20 minutes. If there isn't much information to impart then don't waffle - just reduce the length of the team briefing. Make sure you leave enough time for members of your team to ask questions - this is a two-way form of communication.

How many people should there be in a team briefing?

Ideally, between 4-20 people. If you are part of a very large team you may need to look at the way you structure team briefings. Perhaps you can delegate responsibility to deputies/supervisors who could deliver a brief to a smaller group of

team members? Discuss this with your line manager if you're in any doubt.

My team is geographically dispersed and it would be hard to get them all together. What should I do?

Even if employees are geographically dispersed it's still likely that you will meet with them at least once a month for a team or operational meeting. If this is the case you could carry out the team briefing at the same time i.e. before the operational team meeting. Team briefing is intended to be flexible enough to accommodate even the most extreme of situations.

I am responsible for front line employees and I can't just shutdown essential services to call a team briefing meeting. What should I do?

Try to arrange your team briefing at a time when the majority of your team can attend. If, however, there are members of the team who can't leave their post you could look into arranging cover so they can attend. If this is not possible, you may have to brief these employees separately.

What should I do about briefing absentees?

You should make sure that those who are unable to attend the team briefing still receive the information which was discussed and are given an opportunity to contribute or ask questions. This may mean you have to speak to them individually. You should try to do this as soon as they are available so that the briefing cascade is completed.

What should I do with the feedback I receive?

With any luck your team will give you some useful feedback and make some valid suggestions during your team briefing. It's really important that you do something constructive with this feedback - your team will quickly tire of the system if they feel their views are not being taken seriously.

Use the forms on the last two pages of this document to record their feedback. Make sure you fill them in and give the feedback to your line

manager so it can be fed higher up the management structure if this is appropriate.

I'm not very confident doing face-to-face briefings - can I get some training?

Being able to effectively communicate with your team is a fundamental part of any management role and is an integral part of all the management development courses offered by the University. To find the best course for you please visit the [training and development webpages](#).

TEAM BRIEF – KEY DATES FOR 2016/17

Month	Date written Team Brief circulated to all employees via email	Date cascade begins from Pro-Vice Chancellors and Professional Services Directors	Window when all onward cascades need to be completed – both for academics and professional services colleagues
September	Monday 26 September	Monday 26 September	Friday 7 October
October	Friday 28 October	Monday 31 October	Friday 11 November
November	Friday 25 November	Monday 28 November	Friday 9 December
December	No Team Brief in December 2016		
January	Friday 13 January	Monday 16 January	Friday 27 January
February	Friday 24 February	Monday 27 February	Friday 10 March
March	Friday 24 March	Monday 27 March	Friday 7 April
April	No Team Brief in April 2017		
May	Friday 12 May	Monday 15 May	Friday 29 May
June	Friday 9 June	Monday 12 June	Friday 23 June
July	No Team Brief in July 2017		
August	No Team Brief in August 2017		

Team Brief – Recording of Notes

Briefing team:

Date of briefing:

Prepared by:

Briefing point:

Additional information/notes:

Briefing point:

Additional information/notes:

Briefing point:

Additional information/notes:

Briefing point:

Additional information/notes:

Team Brief – Recording Feedback

Briefing team:

Date of briefing:

Prepared by:

Unanswered questions from this brief:

Remember it is your responsibility to report back answers to these questions. Questions should be answered within 10 working days.

Items of most interest:

Positive suggestions made:

What does the team want to know more about in future briefs: