Right to Disconnect Policy

Version 1.0 – March 2025

Purpose:	The Institute has developed a 'Right to Disconnect' policy which is designed to encourage and support staff employed by the Institute in balancing their working and personal lives, whether they work standard hours in the workplace, work remotely or flexibly, [or a shift pattern]. The policy includes best practice guidance around working hours, the use of technology and more.
Circulation:	This document is available for all staff to review and will be published on the Institute's website.
Policy Author:	HR Manager
Policy Owner:	Vice President for Finance and Corporate Affairs
Approval Date:	Executive Board:
Review Date:	As required.

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Dundalk Institute of Technology Right to Disconnect Policy

1.   Introduction:

The health, safety and wellbeing of all Institute employees is of the utmost importance to us and we encourage and support you to prioritise your own wellbeing. Disconnecting from work and work devices is vital for your wellbeing, and to help you achieve a healthy and sustainable work-life balance.

To encourage and support our employees in balancing their working and personal lives, whether they work standard hours in the workplace, work remotely or flexibly, [or a shift pattern] we have developed a 'Right to Disconnect' policy, which includes best practice guidance around working hours, the use of technology and more.

The Institute recognises that every employee is entitled to switch off outside of normal working hours and enjoy their free time away from work without being disturbed. There may be occasions where contact occurs, including for example where business and operational reasons require contact outside of normal working hours and depending on the nature of an employee's role.

2.   Role of the Institute, our Managers and Employees

All employees have an active role to play in communication management and the reduction of unnecessary business communications outside normal working hours. The Institute encourages the ongoing cultivation of a culture where our employees feel they can disconnect from work and work-related devices and this necessitates a joint approach by the Institute, our managers, and employees. Some of the respective obligations include:

The role of the Institute:

•   To provide information to employees on their working time, in accordance with the relevant legislation.

•   To ensure a safe workplace, in line with the health and safety legislation.

•   To not penalise an employee for acting in compliance with any relevant provision of the health and safety legislation.

The role of the Employee:

•   To ensure that they manage their own working time and take care to protect their safety, health and welfare and the health and safety of co-workers, in line with the health and safety legislation and seek support in doing so if necessary.

- To cooperate fully with any appropriate mechanism utilised by the Institute to record working time, including when working remotely.

- To respect the working time of colleagues and other contacts (including periods of leave).

The role of the Manager:

- Managers in particular play a central role in the successful implementation of this policy and may be given additional training and support as needed. Managers also have a duty to respect their team members' right to disconnect and should provide a good example for their team.

3. **Working Hours**

- Normal Working hours for PMSS staff are between 08.00 a.m. to 06.00 p.m. Monday to Friday. Technical staff by agreement can be until 09.00 p.m.

- Normal class contact hours for academic staff are between 09.00 a.m. to 06.00 p.m. Monday to Friday and by agreement to 09.00 p.m.

- Please note that these hours may differ for staff depending on their roles, work patter, shifts, etc.

- The Institute may contact staff outside of the normal working hours where it is necessary e.g., critical incident including alarm activation, urgent staff/student query, serious student incident, DFHERIS/HEA urgent query, CAO critical periods, student/staff induction, etc.

4. **Electronic & Phone Communications**

The Institute respects your personal time and expect you to disconnect from work e-mails and work communications outside of normal working hours.

[The Institute understands and appreciates that within the Institute people may work non-standard/widely differing patterns of work, so what is the "norm" for one may be different for another.]

Outside your normal working hours or standard office hours, (such as late nights/weekends), may be an opportune time for you to send an email, without any intent to disturb the recipient or in expectation of a speedy answer. In that event, bear in mind the following:

- Try to only check and send e-mails during normal working hours where possible, but we are also mindful of the requirements of those who wish to work in a more flexible manner.

- The sender should give due consideration to the timing of their communication and potential for disturbance. The recipient should understand that they will not be expected to respond until their working time recommences. If you are sending emails outside the normal hours of the working day, please also consider other people's working hours:

  - ➢ Send the e-mail with a signature disclaimer at the end, e.g. "*I have sent this email at a time that is convenient for me. I do not expect you to respond to it outside of your usual working hours*."
  - ➢ Consider drafting the email and sending it during normal working hours or using the 'delay send' option and set it to a specified time on the next working day.
  - ➢ Always consider the tone/contents/context of texts and emails and other electronic communications (e.g., instant messaging apps).

- Please ensure that your out-of-office notifications are properly activated when you are out of the office and that your out-of-office message correctly directs the recipient to the appropriate colleague. Please respect out-of-office notifications when you receive them from others.

- In the case of an urgent or time-sensitive situation after normal working hours, please consider sending a text or making a phone call rather than an email.

- Work communications through social media channels or platforms are not encouraged and employees should not feel that they must respond to social communications from colleagues outside of their working hours.

- Where employees are using Institute provided mobile devices, usage of same must at all times be for Institute business and limited, appropriate personal use

5. **Meetings**

- While meetings can be crucial to strengthen connections between individuals and teams, individual teams and managers are encouraged to review the frequency and timing of meetings they hold to ensure optimum use of time and allow colleagues time to work outside of meetings.

- Avoid scheduling meetings outside of our core hours as listed previously or during lunch hours, unless absolutely necessary.

- Respect people's time by only inviting them to meetings where their presence is necessary. Share and adopt meeting best practices for example ensure there is a clear agenda with relevant material shared in advance, and actions are recorded and shared post the meeting.

6.   Wellbeing

Employees, including those engaging in flexible working arrangements or remote working, are reminded to switch off from work and work devices outside their normal working hours and while on leave. Employees are encouraged to familiarise themselves with their break entitlements as set out in the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997 and to ensure that they are availing of these. If an employee is unable to avail of their rest break, they should inform their manager.

Employees working remotely must take steps to create boundaries between work and personal time.

7.   Reporting Concerns

[Employees will not be reprimanded for failing to answer phone calls, emails, or messages outside of their normal working hours].

If you encounter problems in availing of your right to disconnect, please speak to the person(s) in question in the first instance if you feel comfortable to do so. If you feel that you cannot approach the person directly, then you should approach your manager or another line manager, [or a member of HR] with the objective of resolving the issue quickly and informally. If an informal process has not been successful in resolving the concern, then the formal Institute Grievance Procedure may be utilised.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with our other relevant Institute policies – e.g., Dignity at Work, IT policies, Data Protection, Code of Conduct, etc.

This policy will be revised, amended or updated over time in line with best practice, learnings and any changes in legislation.

8.   Review of this Policy

The Institute reserves the right to alter or amend this policy from time to time and employees will be notified of amendments by way of written notice and/or electronic notice (which may be by e-mail or by notice on the Institute website).

Issued by

HR Office

06 March 2025