

Team Brief Guidelines

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to your online guide to team briefing here at the University. 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 briefing, or a recipient of a briefing.

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, then in the first instance you should approach your line manager for clarification.

If you have any general questions about team briefing or any of the points raised in this guide, then contact the Internal Communications Office at teambriefing@manchester.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 is a large and complex institution undergoing a great deal of change, so face-to-face communication is essential in this environment.

The findings of the University's own Staff Survey reveal that people feel that they need to understand more about their own areas of work if they are to perform effectively. They need to have a clear understanding of their role, as well as the wider objectives of the team and the contribution they are making to the University's future and vision.

Team briefing is an ideal way to deliver important messages to employees to help clarify these areas. It's also an ideal forum for sharing good news and recognising and celebrating your achievements as a team.

But team briefing is not just about giving information, it's a forum for staff to discuss the points being raised and to ask questions. It's a chance for everyone to make a contribution. It's also an opportunity for feedback to be recorded and relayed back up the organisation to the appropriate management levels.

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 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 prevents rumour and the grapevine from gaining credibility
- It's a great form of two-way communication - it's not just about informing people, but listening and responding to questions and concerns
- It enables questions and suggestions to be fed back from staff to the top
- It develops greater awareness and involvement at all levels
- Briefing develops a shared sense of mission, vision, collective aims and reasons why we're here
- Successful team briefing ensures that there is less misunderstanding within your team and other parts of the University
- It ensures that staff are kept up to date on performance, results, progress and policy changes

TEAM BRIEFING CALENDAR

Team Briefing process initiated:	Cascades/Team Briefings completed by:
Monday 1 September	Friday 5 September
Monday 6 October	Friday 10 October
Monday 3 November	Friday 7 November
Monday 1 December	Friday 5 December
Monday 2 February	Friday 6 February
Monday 2 March	Friday 6 March
Monday 6 April	Friday 10 April
Monday 11 May	Friday 15 May
Monday 1 June	Friday 5 June
Monday 6 July	Friday 10 July

THE TEAM BRIEFING PROCESS

As of March 2008, a new system of team briefing for all staff within the University's administration, is being introduced.

The team briefing process will begin on the first Monday of each month (where Bank Holidays fall on a Monday the briefing will take place on the next available working day).

On these dates (outlined in the Team Briefing Calendar), the Registrar will meet with his team of direct reports and give a verbal Core Brief. Where it is felt necessary to support this with a written document, bullet points will be made available.

Each of the Registrar's direct reports must nominate a deputy who can attend this verbal Core Brief session if they themselves are unable to attend.

Those managers who have received the Registrar's verbal Core Brief should then be in a position to deliver their own team brief to their team of direct reports. This team briefing should include the points from the Registrar's Core Brief (around 30% of the content of the briefing), however the majority of the briefing should consist of local information ie: information relating to each specific function/area of work.

These managers should then brief their own teams, again including the information from the Core Brief and the local brief which they have received, and again adding any further local information which they feel may be of relevance to their own individual team.

The cascade of briefings should continue down all relevant levels of management until all teams have received a face-to-face team briefing.

In areas with large staff numbers it may be necessary for managers to brief their deputies/supervisors within these teams and ask them to continue the information cascade. In these cases deputies/supervisors should be given the team brief produced by their manager ie: they will not be required to generate their own team brief.

To ensure that all administrative staff receive the information in a timely manner, all briefings should be delivered within five working days of the initiation of the cascade. See the Team Briefing Calendar for further details.

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.

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 of the part of the administration 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 that 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.

The following points will help you to prepare for a team briefing. If you feel you would benefit from some additional training then you can contact the Staff Training and Development Unit (STDU) at courses-stdu@manchester.ac.uk. The STDU is running a series of short workshops aimed at managers who will be responsible for holding team briefings.

i) ARRANGING YOUR TEAM BRIEFING

Timing

First of all make yourself familiar with the Team Briefing Calendar and work out when you will be expected 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 for at least six months at a time so that your staff are well aware of the dates in advance and can put them into their diaries. 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 4-15 people. If you are responsible for large numbers of staff then it may make sense to identify supervisors/managers/deputies within your team who could deliver team briefing meetings to smaller groups of staff. 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 staff 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 Core 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 staff'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 it's day to day activities
- Should know information - details which staff 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 staff should be made up of two elements - the information contained in the Core Brief from the Registrar (no more than 30% of your briefing) and a local brief with information relevant to your own area of work.

The Core Brief

Your manager will tell you about the Core Brief which will have been generated by the Registrar. This Core Brief will contain items which may be of operational or strategic importance to the administration as a whole.

You should deliver this information to your team as part of your team briefing, however the information from the Core 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 Core Brief as relevant to your team as possible. If the information in the Core Brief is not relevant to your area of work then just mention it but do not dwell on it.

The Local Brief

The majority of your team briefing should be made up of local information which is relevant to your team. 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
Appointments
Retirements/leavers
Visitors
Success stories
Changed locations/functions

Points For Action

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

Progress

Figures, returns, numbers
Marketing
Success stories
Quality issues
Completed projects/activities

Policy Issues

Human Resources policies
Student 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 or waffle about several issues you don't know much about.

Good news!

Don't forget to include good news and achievements. Good news does exist – you just need to find it and communicate it!

Context

Briefers must always remember, and if necessary remind those that they are briefing, that the object of the exercise is to provide information. Briefings are not designed for consultation or negotiation. Team briefings are also not the right place to conduct 'collective discipline'.

Anticipating questions

Remember that your team brief 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 that 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 that the style of your briefings is pretty consistent so that staff come to know what to expect and what their role is in the briefing.

A typical briefing might look like this:

- Announce the beginning of the briefing
- Note taken of any absentees
- The briefer goes through the items on the brief - both Core and local
- 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
- Remind the group of the date of the next meeting

Points about your presentation style

Remember that you are not addressing the United Nations! This is your own team so the briefing should be relaxed and reasonably informal.

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 – be interested! Use examples that the group will recognise

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

Positive – watch out for the habit of excessive apologising. It makes you appear nervous and it can give your staff the impression that you don't really agree with decisions which have been made at a higher level. 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 arm yourself with the reasons which lie behind the information you are giving out

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* of this document 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 download 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.

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 that 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 or 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 administration, or your level of seniority, you will at some point be a recipient of a team brief. 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 brief 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 carry out periodic research into the distribution and effectiveness of team briefing.

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. Please be aware that the cascade of briefings should be completed within five working days of the Registrar initiating the team briefing process.

How long should my team briefing last?

Your briefing should last around 30 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 staff to ask questions - this is a two-way form of communication.

How many people should there be in a team briefing?

Ideally between 4 and 15 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 for a 30 minute meeting. What should I do?

Even though staff 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 try carrying out the team briefing at the same time ie: before the operational team meeting. You should make sure that you make the distinction between the team briefing and the operational meeting so that attendees are clear what is going on. You should endeavour to ensure that the team briefing takes place within the five-day timescale outlined on the team briefing calendar. This may mean that you need to rearrange your team/operational meetings to coincide with this timescale. This timescale has been set in advance to help you plan your meetings. Team briefing is intended to be flexible enough to accommodate even the most extreme of situations.

I am responsible for front line staff and I can't just shut down 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 for half an hour so that they can attend. If this is not possible, you may have to brief these members of staff 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 that you have to speak to them individually when they are back at work. 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 online forms available here to download feedback forms. Make sure you fill them in and give the feedback to your line manager so that 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?

The Staff Training and Development Unit is offering some short workshops on team briefing. Email courses-stdu@manchester.ac.uk for more details.

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.

Item of most interest:

Positive suggestions made:

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