University of Sheffield | University Secretary's Office

The University of Sheffield

Preamble

Membership of the Senate is a duty that only a small proportion of the University community can undertake at any given time. The role therefore requires commitment and engagement. This Code seeks to articulate a shared understanding of the expectations of Senate members and of Senate as a collective decision making body in order to support the effective conduct of Senate business, taking into account the University's constitutional framework (i.e. the Charter, Statutes and Regulations and the Senate Standing Orders) and the additional matters listed below, including those applicable to all members of University staff, particularly the Staff Code of Conduct.

A fully and effectively functioning Senate will help to enable the delivery of the University's strategic objectives and charitable objects and the provision of assurance to the University Council over academic matters.

This Code of Conduct has been prepared with reference to and should be read in the context of:

- Staff Code of Conduct
- University Conflicts of Interest policies, in particular the Conflict of Interest in Decision Making Procedure
- Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom
- Code of Ethics
- The University's Charter, Statutes and Regulations
- The University's Vision and strategic plan and the values expressed therein
- Senate Standing Orders
- The 7 Principles of Public Life (Appendix 2)
- The Office for Students Public Interest Governance Principles (Appendix 1)
- The CUC Higher Education Code of Governance

If appropriate and necessary, serious breaches of this Code will be addressed under the relevant policy or procedure, for example the agreed University disciplinary policy and procedure.

Members of the Senate - Code of Conduct

1. MANAGING INTERESTS

1.1 We will act and make decisions in the best interests of the University as a whole, considering what is best for the University and its present and future beneficiaries.

1.2 As members of the Senate, we will exercise independence. We will not exercise our responsibilities in a personal or individual capacity, or as if delegated by any person or group.

1.3 We will not put ourselves in a position where our personal interests conflict with the duty to act in the interests of the University. We will seek to ensure that any actual or perceived conflict of interest is managed under the Conflict of Interest in Decision Making Procedure.

1.4 We will act impartially, and not be influenced by social or business relationships, or pressure from external interest groups.

1.5 We will not gain materially or financially from our membership of the Senate unless specifically authorised to do so by the Senate and in accordance with the applicable University HR policies.

2. COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

2.1 We will be collectively responsible for seeking to ensure that the Senate acts within its remit and in the best interests of the University as a whole.

2.2 We will ensure that the Senate and its individual members act within the governing documents of the University and the law, and abide by the policies and procedures of the organisation.

2.3 We will attend all appropriate meetings in our capacity as members of the Senate or give apologies to the relevant colleague.

2.4 We will participate in collective decision-making and accept the decisions of the Senate. We will not impede the implementation of any decision of the Senate.

2.5 If the collective decision of the Senate cannot be reconciled with an individual's personal or professional views or judgments then they may request that their opposition be recorded in the meeting Minutes.

2.6 We will prepare fully for all meetings in order to contribute effectively, including reading the agenda, papers and any related emails before the meeting.

2.7 We will actively engage in the business of the Senate and the business of being a member of the Senate.

2.8 We will perform our roles as members of the Senate respectfully, efficiently, and diligently within agreed timescales and to a standard commensurate with both the responsibilities of the role and our individual knowledge, skills, and experience.

3. INCLUSIVITY, BEHAVIOURS AND RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

In line with the Staff Code of Conduct:

3.1 We will foster a positive and inclusive culture and be mindful of the wellbeing of colleagues in the conduct of Senate meetings and business.

3.2 We will promote honesty, fairness and transparency in every aspect of our work as members of Senate.

3.3 We will actively engage in discussion, debate and voting in meetings, contributing in a considered and constructive way.

3.4 We will welcome constructive challenge from other members of the Senate and will promote frank and respectful debate. We will express views openly, courteously and respectfully, particularly when we disagree and/or challenge others, and we will actively listen to alternative perspectives.

3.5 We will approach difficult or contentious decisions constructively and openly. We will ensure that all debate and discussion remains meaningful and pertinent to the matter at issue and will not use excessive debate or procrastination to avoid making a decision.

3.6 We will value the contributions of others and opportunities to share expertise and engage in collaborative working. We will approach differences in viewpoints, opinions, beliefs and arguments with respect and a willingness to learn, and adopt an inclusive approach to our work as members of the Senate, striving to ensure that our words and actions would not reasonably be expected to have a detrimental impact on others, be disrespectful or deliberately non-cooperative.

3.7 We will respect, observe and preserve confidentiality and handle sensitive matters with discretion, including commercial confidentiality and the privacy of individuals.

3.8 We will ensure that any grievances about colleagues are aired and addressed through the appropriate channels.

3.9 As members of Senate, we will act responsibly as members of the University community and be accountable for our actions.

4. INDUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

4.1 We will develop and maintain a sound and up-to-date knowledge of the University and the wider social, economic and political environment in which it operates.

4.2 We recognise and understand that the Senate is part of the constitutional and administrative structures of the University of Sheffield.

4.3 We will use our skills and knowledge to advance the charitable objects and mission of the University.

4.4 We will actively participate and engage in induction activities and ensure this learning is refreshed as needed.

4.5 We recognise the need for continual review and improvement. We will consider our individual and collective needs for training and development and undertake relevant training and ensure this is refreshed as needed.

4.6 We will be active members of the Senate, seeking to make our skills, experience and knowledge available to the University and seeking to do what additional work we have capacity to undertake on behalf of the Senate outside Senate meetings, including sitting on Senate (or Council) committees and subcommittees, working groups and task and finish groups.

4.7 We will actively contribute towards improving the governance of the Senate, including as part of any periodic reflection exercises and/or Effectiveness Reviews.

First Approved: **13 December 2023**
Last Reviewed: **10 June 2026**
Updated: **12 June 2025***
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*Administrative amendment to reflect that the Code of Practice relating to Meetings and Other Activities on University premises was replaced with the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom.
** Hyperlinks contained within the Preamble section reviewed and refreshed.

APPENDIX 1

Extract from the OfS Securing student success: Regulatory framework for higher education in England

Annex B: Public interest governance principles

The public interest governance principles applicable to all registered providers:

I.	**Academic freedom**: Academic staff at an English higher education provider have freedom within the law:	
	●	to question and test received wisdom; and
	●	to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at the provider
II.	**Accountability**: The provider operates openly, honestly, accountably and with integrity and demonstrates the values appropriate to be recognised as an English higher education provider.	
III.	**Student engagement**: The governing body ensures that all students have opportunities to engage with the governance of the provider, and that this allows for a range of perspectives to have influence.	
IV.	**Academic governance**: The governing body receives and tests assurance that academic governance is adequate and effective through explicit protocols with the senate/academic board (or equivalent).	
V.	**Risk management**: The provider operates comprehensive corporate risk management and control arrangements (including for academic risk) to ensure the sustainability of the provider's operations, and its ability to continue to comply with all of its conditions of registration.	
VI.	**Value for money**: The governing body ensures that there are adequate and effective arrangements in place to provide transparency about value for money for all students and (where a provider has access to the student support system or to grant funding) for taxpayers.	
VII.	**Freedom of speech**: The governing body takes such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured within the provider.	
VIII.	**Governing body**: The size, composition, diversity, skills mix, and terms of office of the governing body is appropriate for the nature, scale and complexity of the provider.	
IX.	**Fit and proper**: Members of the governing body, those with senior management responsibilities, and individuals exercising control or significant influence over the provider, are fit and proper persons.	

Additional public interest governance principles applicable to providers authorised with DAPs:

X.	**Records**: Where degree awarding powers are solely contained in the provider's governing documents, and no order either under section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under HERA exists, the provisions setting out those powers must be retained and may not be altered without the consent of the OfS[25].

Additional public interest governance principles applicable to providers in receipt of financial support from the OfS or from UKRI:

XI.	**Independent members of the governing body**: There must be at least one external member of the governing body who is independent of the provider, and whose term of office is normally limited to a maximum of three terms of three years or two terms of four years. For providers with large governing bodies, or more complex legal forms, additional independent members may be appropriate
XII.	**Regularity, propriety and value for money**: The governing body ensures that there are adequate and effective arrangements in place to ensure public funds are managed appropriately, in line with the conditions of grant and the principles of regularity, propriety and value for money, and to protect the interests of taxpayers and other stakeholders. This also applies to any funds passed to another entity for the provision of facilities or learning and teaching, or for research to be undertaken.

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25 This principle ensures that appropriate records are kept regarding degree awarding powers, where no order exists. This is primarily applicable to providers that obtained their powers before 1992, and/or that are incorporated via Royal Charter or a Private Act.

APPENDIX 2

The 7 principles of public life

1.	**Selflessness**
	Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
2.	**Integrity**
	Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
3.	**Objectivity**
	Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
4.	**Accountability**
	Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
5.	**Openness**
	Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
6.	**Honesty**
	Holders of public office should be truthful.
7.	**Leadership**
	Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

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(https://eic.independent-commission.uk/)