



University of Sheffield

University Definitions and Hierarchy

(As amended by the Schools Governance Group and Senate Committees from the original AdvanceHE report and recommended by Senate on 9 October to Council on 28 November 2024)

Definitions of Governance Documents

Charter – The CHARTER defines the constitution and governance of the University, setting out the powers of the University in relation to its Objects, and describing the bodies, officers and documents that will be in place. The Charter establishes the University as a distinct legal entity. All members of the University must comply with the Charter. Changes to the Charter must be approved by the University Council and the Office for Students and Privy Council.

Statutes – The STATUTES contain the fundamental constitutional and governance provisions of the University, providing further detail of the powers, structures and governance established in the Charter. All members of the University must comply with the Statutes. Changes to the Statutes must be approved by the University Council and the Office for Students and Privy Council.

Regulations – a REGULATION sets out the University principles and standards designed to control or govern conduct or provide direction in an area. All members of the University must comply with the Regulations. Powers to make, amend or repeal regulations are set out in Regulation 1 and 2; final responsibility for amendment lies with either Council or Senate.

Framework – a FRAMEWORK provides a structure which addresses how a wide-reaching activity is undertaken at organisational level through policy and procedure provisions, to ensure consistent standards are being met. For example, many universities have a Policy Framework, setting out expectations for staff involved in developing policies, establishing a policy hierarchy, setting out the requirements for creating policies and procedures (including what is included, and excluded, from the framework), and clarifying roles and responsibilities involved in the process. Such a framework will establish a consistent

approach to the development of policies and enable all staff to understand what they need to do to comply.

Policies – a POLICY provides a top-level basis for decision-making and commits the University to a definite method or course of action. It defines what is and is not allowed within the organisation, and is written to ensure consistency and compliance. Policies may also be developed in order to comply with specific legislation and changes within the external regulatory environment, and should support the implementation of University strategies. It is essential that all policies have documented arrangements for communication, application across the University (including training), review, and the monitoring of compliance, as well as explicitly stated consequences for non-compliance. Policies assign responsibilities and will identify an owner who is accountable for implementation and review. They may be supported by procedures, guidelines and codes of practice. All members of the University must comply (for example, the Safeguarding Policy).

Procedures – a PROCEDURE sets out the process and/or actions required to support the implementation of a policy, strategy, regulation or external requirement, and all members of the University must comply. It provides detailed instructions of what to do; it will include what steps to follow and who to involve, and can include links to useful information such as forms or templates, roles with responsibilities in the procedure and links to relevant web or intranet pages. The procedure should be authorised by the route described in the associated policy, usually the policy owner or relevant senior manager (for example, the Safeguarding Procedure).

Codes of Practice – a CODE OF PRACTICE is a set of written rules that detail expected processes or actions to be taken, and help people or organisations comply with particular standards (often related to professional standards or legislative requirements). It can provide protocols, best practice and guidance to ensure that people comply with specific policies and procedures, and should establish expectations of behaviour. Members of the University must comply with Codes of Practice (for example, the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom).

Guidelines or guidance – GUIDELINES or GUIDANCE documents provide direction, advice and support for an activity or area of work, often implemented to support compliance with a policy or procedure. They can be introduced within a School, Faculty or professional services team to suit local circumstances in delivering tasks within a policy or a procedure, as long as the link to the original policy or procedure is retained and the relevant framework is not compromised. Guidelines or guidance documents can be used to support an ‘apply or explain’ approach as encouraged by Committee of University Chairs

in their Higher Education Code of Governance¹ (also described as ‘comply or explain’ by the Chartered Governance Institute²); these documents can support how an organisation may wish to approach implementing policies where they are not mandated to comply with everything (for example, Guidance on the use of unfair means in examinations).

Handbook/manual – a HANDBOOK or MANUAL provides a group of policies and/or procedures that are related to each other.

Hierarchy of Governance Documents

It can be helpful for members of the University to understand how the various governance documents sit in relation to each other. The diagram below reflects the definitions in terms of where documents sit and how they are authorised.

	Document	Applicability	Authority to approve
1.	Charter and Statutes	University level	Council (and OfS/Privy Council)
2.	Regulations	University level	Council or Senate
3.	Scheme of Delegation	University level	Council [or Senate]
4.	Frameworks and Policies / Procedures, Codes, Guidelines etc*	University level	Senior (may be Council or Senate, their committees, UEB or UEB members with delegated authority)
*By exception, there will be instances where local guidance and practice, handbooks and manuals are needed to suit local circumstances in delivering activities within a policy or procedure.			

1

<https://www.universitychairs.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CUC-HE-Code-of-Governance-publication-final.pdf>

2

<https://www.cgi.org.uk/knowledge/governance-and-compliance/features/comply-explain-uk-corporate-governance-code>