ETHICS POLICY

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Open University is an educational charity and its mission is to be:

Open to people, places, methods and ideas

The core values commit the institution to being:

Inclusive
• We play a unique role in society, making Higher Education open to all.
• We promote social justice through the development of knowledge and skills.

Innovative
• We lead the learning revolution, placing innovation at the heart of our teaching and research.
• We continuously seek new and better ways to inspire and enable learning.
• We create world class research and teaching.

Responsive
• We respond to the needs of individuals and employers and the communities in which they live and work.
• We are dedicated to supporting our students’ learning success.

1.2 As an academic institution academic freedom is enshrined in our statutes and ordinances to ensure that ‘academic staff 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’

1.3 The mission and values of the institution inform what we do and how we do it and we will always conduct our business with integrity and in a legal manner. University officers, employees, students, other members of the University and any other associated person acting on the University’s behalf are responsible for acting honestly and with integrity by ensuring that their activities, interests and behaviours do not conflict with these values regardless of their seniority.

2 POLICIES

2.1 In all behaviours and activities staff should uphold the Seven Principles of Public Life (the Nolan Principles):

1. Selflessness
2. Integrity
3. Objectivity
4. Accountability
5. Openness
6. Honesty
7. Leadership

1 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life
2.2 There is no central University authority or infrastructure to support ethical considerations. Rather such considerations are embedded within a range of existing University policies which apply ethical considerations to the context in which they are encountered, defining what is considered ethical, correct procedures to be followed and the sanctions for behaviours that do not meet these requirements. These are:

- Essential documents for students
- Research Ethics
- Gift Income Development Office Ethics Statement
- Anti-Fraud and Anti-Bribery Policies

Information and IT related policies:
- ICT, Information and Records Policies
- Data Protection
- Freedom of Information
- Records/Information Management
- Social Media Policy
- Communications Privacy Policy (internal only)

Staff related policies and procedures:
- Human Resources Policies
- Behaviours and Standards at Work Policy
- Bullying & Harassment Monitoring
- Equality & Diversity Policies
- Health & Safety Policies
- Safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults
- Recruitment of Ex-Offenders Policy
- Trade Union Policy

This is not an exhaustive list of policies but a selection that may guide you in your decision making; the OU website has more staff and student related policies.

3 PROCEDURES

3.1 Staff should consider any ethical issues by referring to the appropriate policy / policies listed above and follow the appropriate procedures defined within those. In the event that the issue is not covered in those policies then they should, in the first instance, be referred to the most appropriate guardian of the relevant policy area.

3.2 If staff encounter situations that they consider may be in contravention of the ethical policies then they should be escalated in accordance with such arrangements as those policies define. If for whatever reason staff feel unable to do this then they can use the mechanisms set out in the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy.

3.3 Managers should set clear standards, encouraging and guiding good practice, and helping staff and others to perform at their best, this includes ethical considerations. Significant issues that are beyond the competence of individual managers to determine should be referred to those responsible for specific policies and procedures or else to the Chief Auditor or University Secretary.
4 COMMUNICATION (INCLUDING TRAINING)

4.1 The University ensures that its ethics and associated policies and procedures are embedded and understood throughout the organisation through internal and external communication, including training that is proportionate to the risk it faces.

4.2 Unit managers or their nominee are responsible for ensuring all employees receive appropriate training and for the communication of the University’s Ethics Policy and other relevant policies to associated person(s). Unit managers should also monitor and review their procedures and action plans to ensure their suitability, adequacy and effectiveness in relation to this Policy and implement improvements as appropriate.

5 TOP LEVEL COMMITMENT

The Vice-Chancellor and the University Secretary endorse this policy and the Academic Policy and Governance unit will review this annually to ensure it is up-to-date and fit for purpose. Each of the associated policies has its own top level commitment strategy.

Policy and links updated November 2016
Academic Policy and Governance