

## STATEMENT OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Open University is an educational charity; we are open to people, places, methods and ideas.

We promote educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential.

The Open University promotes:

Individual well-being of our students through education and pastoral support, focused on student success;

Individual well-being of our staff and partners through our commitment to a dynamic and inclusive culture;

Social and economic well-being through the activities of our students and graduates, the innovation of our researchers, and the high-quality educational programs we produce with our partners;

Responsible use of our planet's resources. Our model of flexible, distance learning is inherently low-carbon. We aim to manage our physical resources sustainably.

We do this by working within an ethical framework which supports our four strategic objectives.

## THE OPEN UNIVERISTY ETHICS FRAMEWORK

### 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In support of The Open University's social mission, ethical considerations are embedded across the University's existing policies. The Open University believes that ethical considerations are best viewed in the context in which they are encountered. Each policy, therefore, sets out the ethical framework with regard to a specific issue, defines the correct procedures to be followed and lists the sanctions for behaviours that do not meet these requirements.

### 2 POLICIES

- 2.1 The key strategic priority for The Open University is student success. It is through our scale, reach and ability to support students to succeed, that we are able to achieve our positive impact on society and the economy.
- 2.2 Supporting our key strategic priority are four strategic objectives: Dynamic and Inclusive Culture, Excellent Teaching and Research, Technology that Enables Success, and Growth and Sustainability. The Open University's key policies are grouped under each objective.

**Dynamic and Inclusive Culture** – *The Open University will:*

*Invest in our people, teams and management to ensure our people are engaged, equipped and supported*

*Create a culture of collaboration and inclusion to ensure all parts of our community are aligned in achieving our long-term ambitions and enable student success*

Underpinning policies:

[Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy](#)

[Behaviours and Standards at Work Policy](#)

[Bullying & Harassment Policy](#)

[Conflict of Interest](#)

[Dignity and Respect Policy](#)

[Equality and Diversity Statement](#)

[Modern Slavery](#)

[Nolan Principles](#)

[Open University Student Charter](#)

[Personal Relationships Policy](#) (internal only)

[Recruitment of Ex-Offenders Policy](#)

[Safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults](#)

[Student Complaints and Appeals](#)

[Trade Union Policy](#) (internal only)

[Whistleblowing](#)

**Excellent Teaching and Research – The Open University will:**

*Ensure our curriculum, teaching and research work together to maximise their positive effect on a diverse community of learners, to improve access to Higher Education, enhance quality and student outcomes, and create new knowledge to impact on society, culture, the economy and governments*

*Continue to deliver development programmes in partnership with governments, NGOs, funding institutions and local partners through our International Development Office*

*Support research into the social, economic, and scientific aspects of climate change, deepening our understanding into the way we interact with complex ecosystems*

*Invest in making the OU a stronger, more vibrant university with enhanced academic distinctiveness and reputation, and making a major contribution to student success*

Underpinning Policies:

[Academic Freedom Principles Statement](#)

[Assessment Handbook](#)

[Plagiarism](#)

[Prevent Principles](#)

[Open University Student Charter](#)

[Student Complaints and Appeals](#)

*Research Related Policies*

[Code of Practice for Research](#)

[Procedure for Dealing with Allegations of Research Malpractice or Misconduct](#)

[Ethics Principles for Research with Human Participants](#)

[Human Research Ethics Procedures](#)

[Animal Research Statement and Ethics Procedures](#)

**Technology that Enables Success** – *The Open University will:*

*Ensure that our digital platforms for students are leading edge and accessible, through continuous innovation and improvement, based on student needs*

*Invest in core systems to simplify and standardise our technology platforms and ensure they remain fit for purpose and accessible through continuous innovation and improvement*

*Streamline our data and analytics provision to support evidence-based approaches to enhancing student success*

*Adopt effective practices that enable us to test and learn from new innovative technologies and ideas*

Underpinning Policies:

[Data Protection](#)

[ICT, Information and Records Policies](#)

[Freedom of Information](#)

[Records/Information Management](#)

[Social Media Policy](#) (internal only)

**Growth and Sustainability** – *The Open University will:*

*Ensure we are financially sustainable on an ongoing basis*

*Manage our estate to comply with, if not exceed, statutory requirements*

Underpinning Policies:

[Health & Safety Policies](#) (internal only)

[Gift Income Development Office Ethics Statement](#)

[Carbon Management Plan](#)

[Waste Management Policy](#)

[Heating Policy](#)

[Environmental and Sustainability Policy](#) and [Performance Report](#)

[Responsible Investment Framework](#); USS [Responsible Investment - Approach](#)

The Open University [policies and procedures website](#) contains more staff policies, and student related policy can be found on the [Student Policies and Regulations site](#).

### **3 PROCEDURES**

- 3.1 The mission and values of The Open University 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.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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'
- 3.4 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 [Whistleblowing Policy](#).
- 3.5 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 Framework 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 University Council endorses this Statement and Framework. The University's Secretary's Office will conduct an annual review to ensure it is up-to-date and fit for purpose.*

University Secretary's Office ([governance-team@open.ac.uk](mailto:governance-team@open.ac.uk))

## **Changes**

**June 2018:** Links moved under strategic priorities and new links added.

**December 2018:** Renamed 'Ethics Policy' to 'Ethics Framework' and new links added

**October 2019:** Corporate Statement of Social Responsibility added; new links added

**Nov 2020:** Policy links updated and reviewed by GNC

**Next Review date:** October 2021