

# University of Aberdeen

## Institutional Ethical Statement

The University recognises that it has an obligation to observe and maintain the highest ethical standards and that these are fundamental to its reputation for integrity. This ethical statement sets out the University's commitment at the highest level to ethical values and behaviours and outlines where further information and guidance regarding specific ethical issues can be found by governors, staff and students.

Ethical standards and considerations apply to every activity in the University and its engagement with the external community. Ethical judgements are contextual but are informed by the University's values and the policies which underpin its operations, by its commitment to the Nolan Seven Principles of Public Life and by the relevant professional standards applicable to specific academic disciplines. The University is also committed to ensuring that its activities are conducted in accordance with relevant international, national and regional laws and regulations applicable to a particular circumstance.

This ethical statement is supported by the detailed policies and procedures that provide guidance on specific ethical issues that may arise in particular areas of the University's activities. A list of these policies and procedures (with weblinks) is included below.

In addition to adhering to the more detailed policies and procedures, this Ethical Statement requires that employees, students and governors, and anyone carrying out work on behalf of the University, will respect and adhere to the following institutional values and the professional standards of conduct as enshrined in the Nolan Seven Principles of Public Life. This Statement includes the following sections:

- The University's Institutional Values;
- Questions to think about when making Ethical decisions;
- Where to find further information on relevant policies and procedures;
- The Nolan Seven Principles of Public Life.

### Institutional Values

Our idea of a University is centred on the following five values as articulated in the University's Strategic Plan for 2015-2020:

- Innovation and relevance in our education, research and engagement
- Independence and responsibility of thought and action
- Sustainable partnerships with stakeholders - driving a culture of inclusion and accessibility
- Respect for all within and beyond the University
- An empowered and ambitious community in which all can thrive

### Ethical Decision Making: Questions to Consider

#### Making the Decision

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Does any specific policy/procedure apply?</li><li>▪ What values are relevant from the Ethical Statement? What options are consistent with the Ethical Statement, and what options can you eliminate</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Which of your personal values are relevant?</li><li>▪ Whose interests are potentially affected? (your own, other people's, the University's...)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Discuss the issue with your line manager or, if appropriate, your colleagues. What do they think?</li></ul> |
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### Final Checks: Ask Yourself?

- Is my decision consistent with the Ethical Statement?
- How would I feel if someone did this to me?
- Will this decision bring about a good result?
- Would I be happy for this decision to be public or reported in the media?
- Would I be happy if my family knew what I am about to do?
- How will taking this action affect my character, or the character and reputation of the University of Aberdeen?

## Where to Find Further information on related University Policies and Procedures

The following links to policies and procedures cover many of the areas of University activities where ethical issues may arise. It is not an exhaustive list but covers the most relevant policies and procedures.

### The Student Experience

#### *Applications for Study*

The University's Student Recruitment and Admissions Policy refers and is available [here](#).

#### *Teaching and Learning*

The University's commitment to provide its students with the highest standards of teaching and Learning is articulated in the [Student Partnership Agreement](#). More specific information regarding guidance and learner support is provided in the [Academic Quality Handbook](#).

Information on the University's procedures for assuring and enhancing quality in teaching [is provided in the academic quality handbook](#).

Information on the University's Student Complaints and Appeals Procedures is available [here](#).

#### *Academic Misconduct*

University policy on plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct: The [Discipline Code](#) (students only) and Policy and Guidelines on Good Research Conduct (for staff, please refer to Section 4 of the institution's [Research Handbook](#)).

#### *Staff and Student Relationships*

The University's [Policy on Staff:Student Conflicts of Interest](#) refers.

#### *Discrimination or harassment:*

Staff:student: Refer to the [Discrimination, Harassment & Bullying Policy](#)

Between students: Refer to the [Discipline Code for Students](#)

### Research

#### *Procedures for Research Governance and the Ethical Review of Research*

Information on University and College procedures in relation to Research Governance and the Ethical Review of Research is available [here](#).

### *Academic Freedom*

The University supports academic freedom within UK law for those who are engaged in teaching and/or the provision of learning and/or research at the University of Aberdeen to further knowledge and debate. Further information on academic freedom is included within the staff disciplinary procedures available [here](#).

## **People and our Community**

### *Health and Safety*

Ensuring that our campuses are safe places for staff, students and visitors is a priority for the University. Extensive information and advice on Health and Safety is available [here](#).

### *Equality and Diversity*

The University is fully committed to equality for all its staff and students and will not tolerate discrimination on the basis of race, religion, political beliefs, national origin, colour, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status or disability. Further information on Equality and Diversity related policies and University initiatives in this area are available [here](#).

### *International Activities*

The University and its staff should respect the traditions and culture of each country with which it has dealings. Where these conflict with the principles and values set out in this statement, staff should seek guidance from their line manager. Particular processes are in place to undertake due diligence with respect to formal international partnerships and for research where ethical approval may be necessary before working in another country that may have lower standards to the UK. Where particularly sensitive issues arise which might bring significant reputational risk, these may be referred to the Court's Governance and Nominations Committee.

### *Staff conduct and External Activities*

The University is a community where everyone has the right to be treated with courtesy and respect. In addition, the integrity of the institution externally and those representing it are key to the University's reputation. The University has a range of policies and procedures to guide staff and to address allegations of unacceptable or inappropriate staff conduct. Further information is available [here](#) or from the Department of Human Resources.

### *Conflicts of Interest*

The establishment of links between University employees and outside bodies – whether government departments, commerce, industry, or others – is not only in the public interest but also benefits the University and the individuals concerned. However, it is possible that such links may give rise to potential conflicts of interest. A Code of Practice to help individuals assess whether or not proposed activities could cause a conflict of interest and to outline the procedure for disclosure of any perceived or potential conflict is available [here](#).

## **Sustainability and Social Responsibility**

The University is committed to the twin principles of sustainability and social responsibility as foundations for all its activities. Further information on the University's Strategy for Sustainability and Social Responsibility, and a range of related policies, activities and initiatives is available [here](#).

## **Leadership, Management and Governance**

The University is committed to the highest standards of corporate governance, openness and accountability across its activities. The University Court has extensive procedures to ensure national standards of good governance practice are followed and this is reported upon annually in the University's [Financial Statements](#). In addition, governors and management are expected to adhere to the University's ethical statement, its institutional values and the Nolan Seven Principles of Public Life in pursuance of their responsibilities.

The University's Code of Practice on [Whistleblowing](#) is in place to enable and support individuals who wish to highlight circumstances where they feel the University has failed to meet these standards.

## Finance and Fundraising

### *Fundraising and Donations*

The University is committed to harnessing the support of alumni and donors to invest in the future development of the institution, its students and staff. The University and the Development Trust also recognise the need for best practice in relations with donors and due diligence in regard to the provenance and conditions attached to a potential donation. A [Policy for the Acceptance of Gifts](#) (Fundraising and Donations) is in place but staff who are approached by a potential donor must contact the Director of the Development Trust before any acceptance or refusal of an approach from a donor is made.

### *Acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality and the UK Bribery Act 2010*

The Act makes it an offence to accept or offer a bribe. University employees must ensure that gifts either received or given do not affect, or are perceived to affect, the outcome of business or research activities. Further guidance on this, and the action employees should take if offered a gift or hospitality, is available in Section 28 of the [Staff Expenses and Benefits Policy](#).

### *Investment, Procurement and Fairtrade*

The University's Policy on Sustainable Investment is available [here](#).

The University's Procurement Procedures include guidance to help ensure staff and the Institution do not engage with suppliers, contractors or business partners who could endanger the University's reputation and that such parties are socially and environmentally responsible. Further information including a code of ethics for staff engaged in procurement and supplementary guidance on sustainable procurement is also available [here](#).

The University's Fairtrade Policy is available [here](#).

## Seven Principles of Public Life

*(as adopted by the University)*

**Selflessness:** Governors and staff should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

**Integrity:** Governors and staff should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

**Objectivity:** In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, Governors and staff should make choices on merit.

**Accountability:** Governors and staff are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

**Openness:** Governors and staff should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

**Honesty:** Governors and staff have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

**Leadership:** Governors and staff should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

**Approved by Court 25 March 2014; Updated January 2017**