

Health Sciences University

Code of Conduct for Governors

Version:	4
Approved by:	Governance & Nominations Committee
Originator/Author:	University Secretary / Governance Administrator
Owner	University Secretary
Reference source:	HE exemplars / legislation
Date last approved:	06/02/2025
Effective from:	Immediate
Review date:	Feb/March 2027
Target:	Governors, staff and students
Document location:	Staff SharePoint site & Board of Governors Teams Channel
Equality analysis	No direct impact, the policy provides for equality analysis to be undertaken as part of policy review. The policy provides for information to be made available in alternative formats as required, to make reasonable adjustments in line with the Equality Act 2010.

1. Introduction

1.1 This Code is intended as a guide for members of the Board of Governors of the University:

- a) to indicate the standards of conduct and accountability which are expected of them;
- b) to enable them to understand their legal and ethical duties;
- c) to assist them in carrying out their responsibilities; and
- d) to support their relationship with the University and its Executive.

This Code is therefore aimed at promoting effective, well-informed and accountable corporate and charitable governance, and is not intended to be a definitive or authoritative statement of the law.

1.2 In addition to this Code, those covered by the code are expected to be familiar with the following, which are provided on appointment:

- a) the Articles of Association of the institution
- b) the Governance Rules & Bye-Laws
- c) the University's Strategic Plan and Supporting Strategies;
- d) the Office for Students' Conditions of Registration and terms and conditions of funding for higher education institutions; and
- e) the CUC Higher Education Code of Governance.

1.3 Acceptance of appointment as a member of the Board of Governors and of the Higher Education Corporation is construed as acceptance of this Code.

2. Scope and definitions

2.1 This Code applies to the Board of Governors, any committee, forum or task and finish group and to every subsidiary company or joint venture of the University to which Governors may be appointed or over which they may have jurisdiction or responsibility whether explicit or implied.

3. Purpose

3.1. The purpose of this Code is to provide all governors with guidance on the standards of behaviour and conduct expected by the University.

3.2 This Code supports the decision-making process through which such a judgement on absence or whether a governor "is unable or unfit to discharge the functions of a member" may be made.

4. Values

4.1 Public service values are at the heart of higher education and a University's service ethos. The University has set out its values in the Strategic Plan for 2021-2026; these values are expressed as follows:

- a) **Caring** – Caring is demonstrated every day by expressing and accepting caring, compassion and respect in our personal and professional relationships. As a health sciences university, we treat people with respect and compassion on a daily basis
- b) **Professional** – We take pride in the quality and standards of the work that we do and the relationships we form. We are competent and reliable, working in an ethical way and seek to be excellent in all that we do.
- c) **Passionate** – We passionately believe in the power of education to inspire and transform lives, and in healthcare to enable and support people to reach their full potential, to be happy, live well and thrive.

- d) **Inclusive** – We welcome diversity as an essential component of a healthy society and an enriched educational environment. We strive to create a safe and accessible space where all students and staff feel they belong and can flourish as part of our supportive community. Our patient services are centred on the needs of each individual, delivered in an atmosphere of dignity and respect.
- e) **Collaborative** – To play our part in solving complex world problems we believe in the power of working together. Our multi-professional environment provides opportunities for collaborative working, interprofessional education and multidisciplinary patient care to benefit our students, staff and patients. We are small and specialist but together with our partners we can make a big difference.

- 4.2 The high standards of personal and corporate conduct, based on these values and the Nolan principles, underpin this Code, and the actions and decisions taken within the Board and the University community. An extract of the report of the Nolan Committee describing these principles is set out in para 4.5 below.
- 4.3 The University recognises its obligations to all those with whom it has dealings, including students, patients, employees, suppliers, other educational institutions and the wider community. In particular, the University is committed to combating any discrimination within the University on the grounds of race, ethnic or national origin, gender, religion, age, disability or sexual orientation. The University is committed to treating individuals fairly, with dignity and respect, and thus expects integrity, honesty and fairness to be displayed by its Governors in the same way as expected of its students and employees. There are additionally specific duties expected of the Governors under equality legislation and described within the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
- 4.4 The Board is also committed to ensuring that it conducts its business in accordance with the highest ethical standards as set out in the Code and its procurement guidance and financial regulations.
- 4.5 Governors recognise that they must operate within the principles laid down by the Nolan Committee for those holding public office. The following is an extract from the Second Report of the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life, May 1996:

Selflessness:

Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

Integrity:

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might 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, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability:

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness:

Holders of public office 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:

Holders of public office 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:

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

5. Powers

- 5.1 Governors are responsible for taking decisions which are within the powers given to the University under the Education Reform Act 1988 as amended by the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 (see summary at Appendix 1). If a governor thinks that the Board is likely to exceed its powers by taking a particular decision, they should immediately discuss the issue with the Chair and refer the matter to the University Secretary for advice. The position is similar for a member of a committee.

6. Duties and Responsibilities**6.1 Fiduciary and other duties**

Governors owe a fiduciary duty to the University and must carry out such fiduciary duties responsibly. This means that they should show the University the highest loyalty and act in good faith in its best interests. Each person should act honestly, diligently and independently. Their actions should promote and protect the good reputation of the University and the trust and confidence of those with whom it deals.

- 6.2 Decisions taken by governors at meetings of the Board and its committees must be for the benefit of the University and not serve any improper purpose or personal motive. The “benefit of the University” can be taken to mean, first and foremost, the interests of its students, its staff and other users of the University’s services, and the safeguarding of public and charitable funds. Those covered by this Code should have regard to the best interest of the University and must not allow any sectional interest to take precedence. In particular, governors are not appointed as ‘representatives’ or ‘delegates’ of any outside body, and may not lawfully be bound in their speaking or voting by mandates given to them by other bodies, persons or vested interests.

6.3 Use of Public and Charitable Funds

Governors must take appropriate measures to ensure the University uses resources efficiently, economically, effectively and equitably, avoiding waste and extravagance. There is a duty to ensure the safeguarding of public funds and ensure the stewardship and the proper custody of the assets of the charity, including those which have been publicly funded.

6.4 Statutory Accountability

Governors are collectively responsible for observing the duties set out in the Office for Students’ terms and conditions of funding for higher education institutions. These are available on the Office for Students’ website www.officeforstudents.org.uk ‘Guide to Funding’ and are updated regularly.

Governing bodies are responsible for the appointment and removal of external and internal auditors. Governing bodies are also responsible for appointing outsourced internal audit providers, on the advice of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee, and for choosing to move between outsourced and insourced internal audit provision, also after taking advice from the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee. Staff appointments and terminations for insourced internal audit staff are a matter for management, with the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee advising on the appointment and termination of the Head of Internal Audit.

Governors should note that they are also responsible for the proper use of income derived from other public and private sources, such as tuition fees through Student Finance England, and the National Health Service commissioning bodies including the monitoring of expenditure from such income, in order to meet the requirements of the relevant funding body and public audit.

7.0 Collective Responsibility

- 7.1 The Board operates by Governors taking majority decisions in a corporate manner at quorate meetings. Therefore, a decision of the Board, even when it is not unanimous, is a decision taken collectively and each individual has a duty to stand by it, whether or not they were present at the meeting when the decision was taken. No Governor can act on their own without the proper authority from the Board and all carry equal responsibility for decisions made.
- 7.2 If a Governor disagrees with a decision taken by the Board or Committee, their first duty is to have any disagreement discussed and minuted. If the individual still strongly disagrees, they should consult the Chair and, if necessary, then raise the matter again with the Board when it next meets, if appropriate. Alternatively, the Governor may decide to offer their resignation from office, after consulting the Chair.

8.0 Skill, care and diligent performance

- 8.1 The Board seeks to ensure that all Governors are appointed on merit and expertise, in accordance with an open selection procedure overseen by the Board's Governance & Nominations Committee. Individuals appointed to the Board are drawn widely from the community in having regard for the need for continuity, balance and a range of appropriate experience, skills and interests.
- 8.2 Recognising the volunteer nature of governance, those involved should competently and conscientiously perform the duties outlined in their roles and undertake the reasonable tasks requested by the University. A Governor should, in all their work for the University, exercise such skill as they possess, and such care and diligence as would be expected from a reasonable person in the circumstances. This is particularly relevant when a person acts as an agent of the University, for example, when functions are delegated to the Chair, a committee Chair or an individual member. Governors must act within the terms of reference of the Board or committee on which they serve.
- 8.3 In order to promote more effective governance, Governors are expected to carry out a regular self-evaluation process as part of the Face-to-Face review process with the Chair, and contribute to the review of the performance and effectiveness of the governance of the University more generally.

9.0 Openness, Confidentiality and Use of Official Information

- 9.1 Agendas, minutes and other papers relating to meetings of the Board, are normally available for public inspection, and are published on the HSU website once they have been approved.
- 9.2 There are occasions, however, when the record of discussions and decisions are not made available for public inspection; for example, when the Board is considering sensitive or commercial issues, or named individuals, and for other good reasons. Such excluded items are kept confidential to the Board by the Governance Administrator.
- 9.3 It is important that the Board and its committees have full and frank discussions in order to take decisions collectively. To do so, there must be trust between Governors with a shared corporate responsibility for decisions (see section 7). Governors should keep confidential any matter which, by reason of its nature, the Chair or members of any committee of the Board are satisfied should be dealt with on a confidential basis.
- 9.4 Governors must not exhibit behaviour or engage in activity, whether it be within or external to the University, that may damage the good reputation of the University. They should also note that their correspondence and documents in relation to the University are subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act and the Data Protection Act.
- 9.5 Governors should not make statements to the press or media or at any public meeting relating to the University or the proceedings of the Board or its committees without first having contacted the University Marketing & Communications Department and also having obtained the approval of the Chair or, in their absence, the Deputy Chair. It is unethical for Governors publicly to criticise, canvas or reveal the views of other Governors which have been expressed at meetings of the Board or its committees.

10.0 Conflicts of Interest and Loyalty

- 10.1 Like other persons who owe a fiduciary duty, Governors should seek to avoid putting themselves in the position where there is a conflict (actual or potential) between their personal or professional interests and their duties to the Board or its committees. They should not allow any conflict of interest or loyalty to arise that might interfere with the exercise of their independent judgement.
- 10.2 Governors must disclose routinely to the University interests, financial or otherwise, which they or their spouses, children or other close relatives may have, in order that the Governance Administrator enters such interests on the Register. Material should be placed on the Register if it is likely or would, if publicly known, be perceived as being likely, to interfere with the exercise of a person's independent judgement. They must give sufficient details to allow the nature of the interest to be understood by enquirers. Individuals should inform the Governance Administrator whenever their circumstances change and interests are acquired or lost. In deciding whether an interest should be disclosed, they should have regard to the meaning given in "interest" and "close relative" below.
- 10.3 For the purposes of this Code, "close relative" includes but is not limited to a father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, partner, child, grandchild and step-father/ mother/ brother/ sister/ child/ grandchild.
- 10.4 For the purpose of this Code, "interest" is where there is a supply of works or goods, contract or proposed contract, or other matter private or personal under consideration by the Board or its committees where, arising from the chance of financial gain; kinship; friendship; membership of a commercial company; membership of associations pledged to render mutual assistance; membership of an association or

trade union; trusteeship or other private or personal relationship; a person could be seen as conflicted.

11. Political Activity

- 11.1 While Governors may be politically active, in the conduct of their work on the Board, its committees or in service to the University, they should be (and be seen to be) politically impartial and even-handed in dealing with political parties. Guidance from The Cabinet Office [Code of conduct for board members of public bodies - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk) should be used if concerns arise about undue political activity by those covered by the Code.

12. Attendance at Meetings

- 12.1 A high level of attendance at meetings of the Board and its committees is expected so that Governors can perform their functions properly. A Governor who is unable to attend relevant meetings and events on a regular basis should offer their resignation from office. If at any time the Board is satisfied that a Governor has been absent from meetings of the Board for a period of twelve months without the permission of the Board, the Governor may be removed from office.

13. University Regulations, Policies and Procedures

- 13.1 Governors have a duty to ensure they are fully aware of and comply with University regulations, policies and procedures such as financial regulations, and material on data protection, intellectual property, bribery, equality and diversity, and sexual violence and harassment. They must also recognise their responsibility under relevant Health and Safety legislation and comply with the University Health and Safety policy and procedures.
- 13.2 Governors should treat any staff employed by the University or its subsidiaries with courtesy and respect and may expect similar consideration. Those covered by this Code should not act in a way that may damage the relationship of trust and confidence between the University and its employees, or which would conflict with the University's Code of Conduct for Staff.

14. University Resources

- 14.1 All University resources must be used for the purposes of the University and not for personal use, gain or other purposes. Resources include financial arrangements, IT equipment, email, internet, telephone and other University property.
- 14.2 When claiming expenses and allowances, Governors must comply with the University's financial regulations and take personal responsibility for any HM Revenue and Customs requirements which affect them.

15. Gifts and Hospitality

- 15.1 Governors must not accept gifts, hospitality or benefits of any kind from a third party which might be seen to compromise their personal judgement or integrity or which might place the person under improper or inappropriate obligation. Any offer or receipt of such gifts, hospitality or benefits should immediately be reported to the Governance Administrator and University guidance followed in accordance with the Gifts and Hospitality Policy.
- 15.2 In canvassing for gifts, donations or benefits as part of the philanthropic and fundraising work of the University, Governors must ensure the appropriate ethical position declared by the University is maintained, and ensure gifts and benefits are retained

by the University without making commitments that the University cannot fulfil.

- 15.3 The Governance Administrator maintains a Register of Gifts and Hospitality personal to Governors, which is open for public inspection and the Head of Finance & Procurement holds the records of gifts and benefits donated to the University, made public in accordance with donor wishes.

16. Poor conduct

- 16.1 Without providing a precise definition of conduct which is unacceptable, the following are examples which could be seen as a breach of this Code of Conduct:
- a) Breach of confidentiality or trust
 - b) Consistent refusal to comply with reasonable requests from respective Chair
 - c) Failure to observe Health and Safety regulations
 - d) Failure to observe and comply with relevant University policies and / or procedures
 - e) Consistent lack of attendance
 - f) Consistent failure to read preparatory papers
 - g) Consistent inappropriate intervention in meeting discussion
 - h) Misuse of University equipment and resources including IT, email and the internet
 - i) Aggressive or offensive language or behaviour, including physical violence
 - j) Harassment or bullying
 - k) Fraud or deliberate falsification of records
 - l) Serious incapability during University duties due to the influence of alcohol or illegal substances
 - m) Criminal damage on the University's premises
 - n) Discriminatory behaviour as defined in the University's Equality and Diversity Policy – noting that such actions on the grounds of race, sex, disability, age, pregnancy, sexual orientation and religion or belief are unlawful
 - o) Serious breach of security or of financial procedures
 - p) Behaviour bringing the University's good name into disrepute

This list is not exhaustive.

17. Complaints and Breach of Code

- 17.1 The University has established appropriate procedures to ensure that the affairs of the University are conducted in an open and transparent manner, this Code of Conduct for Governors being one of them. Staff, students or others may raise concerns about the conduct of a governor directly with the Chair. If the concern is with the conduct of the Chair of the Board, then concerns may be raised directly with the Senior Independent Governor.
- 17.2 Provided that such complaints of a breach of this Code are made in good faith, and in the reasonable belief that the disclosed concern shows poor governance practice, the matter will be taken forward initially informally. However, if unresolved or as necessary by the nature of the complaint, an investigating panel will be formed with the Chair, the Vice Chancellor and one independent governor for the purpose of investigation and action. If the complaint is against the Chair, the investigation panel will be comprised of the Senior Independent Governor, the Vice Chancellor and one independent governor.
- 17.3 The raising of concerns through this procedure are protected through the University's Whistleblowing Policy and comply with the University's Grievance Policy and Procedure.

APPENDIX 1 SUMMARY OF THE STATUTORY POWERS OF THE CORPORATION

Under Section 123A and 123B of the Education Reform Act 1988, as amended,

123A Principal powers of a higher education corporation in England

- 1) A higher education corporation in England has power—
 - a) to provide higher education;
 - b) to provide further education;
 - c) to provide secondary education suitable to the requirements of persons who have attained the age of 14 years;
 - d) to provide education which is secondary education by virtue of section 2(2B) of the Education Act 1996 (definition of secondary education);
 - e) to participate in the provision of secondary education at a school; and
 - f) to carry out research and to publish the results of the research or any other material arising out of or connected with it in such manner as the corporation think fit.
- 2) A higher education corporation in England may not provide education of a kind specified in subsection (1)(c) or (d) unless they have consulted such local authorities as they consider appropriate.

123B Supplementary powers of a higher education corporation in England

- 1) A higher education corporation in England has power to do anything which appears to the corporation to be necessary or expedient for the purpose of, or in connection with, the exercise of any of their principal powers.
- 2) The corporation's "principal powers" are the powers conferred by section 123A(1).