



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**

Code of Practice for Members of Committees and Groups

Including Networks, Grants Delivery Group, Standing Advisory Groups and Steering Groups

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Introduction

This Code of Practice sets out the basis on which the members of ESRC's Committees and Groups should seek to discharge their responsibilities.

Code principles

This Code of Practice is derived from the 'Nolan principles', which are the basis of the ethical standards expected of public office holders: the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#) (see Annex I). Following these principles Committees and Groups must at all times:

- observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to stewardship of public funds for which they are responsible
- in accordance with Government policy on openness and responsiveness, comply fully with the [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#)
- be accountable to Parliament, users of services, individual citizens and staff for the activities of UKRI, its stewardship of public funds and the extent to which key performance targets and objectives have been met
- maximise value for money through ensuring that services are delivered in the most efficient and economical way, within available resources, and within independent validation of performance achieved wherever practicable. Value for money is not the lowest price: it is the optimum combination of whole life costs and quality to meet the user's requirement.

The role of Council

The ESRC Council consists of the Executive Chair and between five and 12 ordinary members from the academic community, business, civil and the public sector.

The ESRC Council has responsibility for making decisions on scientific, research and innovation matters relevant to administering social science research.

Council advises the Executive Chair and [UKRI Board](#) on social science activity that contributes to economic growth, advances knowledge and improves the quality of life in the UK and beyond.

The role of the Chair of Groups and Committees

The Chair of a Group or Committee is the normal channel of communication between the Council and the Group or Committee. Individual members have right of access to the Executive Chair on any matter which they believe raises important issues relating to his or her duties as a member of the Committee or Group. Day to day contact with the ESRC should be with the relevant Secretary of the Committee or Group.

The Chair and Secretary should ensure that all new members of the Committee or Group are properly briefed on the terms of their appointment, and on their duties and responsibilities..

Corporate responsibilities of Committee and Group Members

The purpose and responsibilities of the committee/group are detailed in the committee or group's terms of reference,

Responsibilities of individual Committee and Group Members

Members have a duty to bring an independent judgement to bear on all issues considered by the Committee or Group and to comply at all times with this Code of Practice and with rules relating to the use of public funds. Members are expected to act in good faith and in the best interests of the ESRC. They should follow the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#) set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (the Nolan Committee). These are set out at Annex I.

Although any legal proceedings initiated by a third party are likely to be brought against the Council, in exceptional cases proceedings (civil or, in certain cases, criminal) may be brought against Committee or Group chairs or other individual members. For example, a member may be personally liable if he or she makes a fraudulent or negligent statement which results in loss to third party. A member who misuses information gained by virtue of his or her position may be liable for breach of confidence under common law or under insider dealing legislation. However, individual members who act honestly, and in good faith should not incur any liability in an individual capacity, save where the person has acted recklessly.

Members who require further advice should consult the Committee or Group Secretary.

The arrangements for appointing individual members normally make it possible to remove him or her from the Committee or Group if he/she fails to perform the duties required of a member to the standards expected of persons who hold public office.

Members should ensure that they understand fully the terms of their appointment, and their duties and responsibilities.

Conflicts of Interest of Members of Committees and Groups

To observe the high standards of integrity expected by the public and Parliament, the proper conduct of public business requires the Chair and members of Committees and Groups to avoid situations in which their duties and other interests conflict or where there should be a suspicion of conflict.

All members will be required, on taking up their appointments, to declare any private, professional or commercial interests that might be conceivably conflict with the interests of the ESRC. Members must complete a short Register of Interests return

(<https://www.ukri.org/about-us/how-we-are-governed/conflicts-of-interests/>) which indicates any substantive interest. Such interests will include university, independent research establishment and company appointments, directorships, consultancies, visiting and honorary appointments. These interests will be registered centrally and updated annually, and used as indicated below. This register will be open for public inspection and is available on the ESRC website (<https://www.ukri.org/publications/conflict-of-interests-register-for-esrc-2020-to-2021/>)

Before each meeting, the Chair will be briefed on any potential conflicts of interest that might be generated by items on the agenda. The register of interests will be used as source material for the briefing. At the beginning of each agenda item the Chair will draw attention to any potential conflicts of interest and invite the Committee or Group to agree what action to take (eg a member with a conflict of interest should be required to leave the meeting for that item). Members will also be expected to declare at meetings any interests that may be perceived as conflicting and which are not identified by the Chair.

The minutes of a meeting will record decisions about conflict of interests, any withdrawals for particular items and the reasons for these withdrawals. It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that this procedure is followed.

Confidentiality

All personal data must be handled in line with the current UK Data Protection Legislation¹. All papers and correspondence must be treated in confidence. The 'In Confidence' marking on all papers means that although the contents may be discussed as necessary with others who have received them, this should be done with discretion. When, exceptionally, a higher classification is necessary, special circulation arrangements will normally be made. Members must respect such classifications.

Members should observe the requirement for confidentiality and are asked to keep secure papers that come to them in their official capacity and, when their term of office has come to an end, to make sure that all papers are returned or destroyed.

Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI) & Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR)

UKRI has an obligation to respond to specific requests, including from the general public, made under FOI and EIR and may be required to disclose information. This means that any information held relating to the committee or group's discussions, regardless of format, is subject to disclosure to the public in response to requests. All requests are handled on a case-by-case basis, and exemptions only applied where appropriate.

¹ The current UK Data Protection Legislation consists of the [UK Data Protection Act 2018](#) and the [UK General Data Protection Regulations \(GDPR\)](#)

Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

UKRI has a responsibility to promote equality and diversity throughout its activities as part of its public sector duties. More information can be found at: [ESRC policies and standards – UKRI](#). Our ambition is for ESRC, as part of UKRI, to be recognised as a leader in equality, diversity and inclusion in the research community, working with partners throughout the sector. Individuals acting on behalf of ESRC, including Council and advisory network members are both protected by and expected to act in accordance with the law.

Openness and responsiveness

Members should ensure they can demonstrate that they are using resources to good effect, with probity, and without grounds for criticism that public funds are being used for private, partisan or party political purposes. Members and ESRC staff should conduct all their dealings with the public in an open and responsible way, following the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#) and ensuring full compliance with the [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#).

Annex I: The Seven Principles of Public Life

The Government endorses the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by the Nolan Committee for the benefit of all who serve the public in any way. These principles apply to all aspects of public life. The principles are set out below:

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 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 submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Holders of the 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.