

# **POLICY FRAMEWORK**

## **1. Purpose of the Framework**

This Framework aims to establish a standard and principles as guidance for all staff involved in policy development, approval, implementation and review across the University. This will ensure the University has consistent standards for relevant and up to date governance documentation.

The Framework applies to all University policy documents that are to be developed (i.e. new policies) or current documents that are under review.

To ensure a fair and consistent approach across the University, and to protect individuals and the University, policies must:

- Be consistent with existing University Charter, Statutes and Ordinances
- Be consistent with the high-level strategies of the University
- Be consistent with the Vision and Values of the University
- Comply with legislation, regulations and codes of practice
- Be guided by national and international best practice
- Be informed by continuous review and improvement
- Apply and be binding across the University

## **What is covered by the Framework**

The Policy Framework applies to University policy documentation. It can also be used to guide the following documents: regulations, codes of practice, procedures and guidelines/user guides.

These are public documents appropriate for wide circulation and publication on University internet sites which include rules and guidance having a significant impact on the Ulster University community and/or contain information necessary for an external audience.

## **Roles & Responsibilities**

**Portfolio leads (Directors and Pro-Vice-Chancellors) are the policy owners for their respective portfolios. They are responsible for:**

- continuous monitoring and review of their policy portfolio to ensure relevance, accuracy, and fitness for purpose
- identifying the need for a particular policy to help the University meet its strategic objectives and/or ensure regulatory compliance
- drafting new/revised policies
- equality screening the draft policy
- ensuring that any new or revised policy is approved by the Senior Leadership Team and/or delegated authority
- being aware of the Framework and ensuring that policies comply with the Framework
- ensuring legal and human rights proofing as required
- ensuring the policy upholds the University's strategic objectives, core values, vision and mission
- consulting on and implementing the policy/feedback received during consultation,
- ensuring equality and good relations monitoring requirements are adhered to, and
- formally reviewing policies at least every five years to ensure that they continue to be relevant.

On approval all policy owners are responsible for:

- submission of the final approved policy to the Office of the University Secretary (OUS) Policy repository on Sharepoint
- submission of the final approved policy and completed screening pro forma to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion unit
- effective communication of the policy across the University as required
- providing appropriate guidance for the implementation of the policy
- liaising with People & Culture to ensure any training requirements are met; and
- policy implementation and monitoring

The Office of the University Secretary (OUS) is responsible for:

- communicating information on the Framework to policy owners
- disseminating information about the Framework to all staff
- publishing the Framework on its web page, together with links to all University strategic policies
- communication with Council on policy changes/updates as appropriate
- oversight and management of the University strategic policy repository
- ensuring that the relevant portfolio lead is notified prior to a policy's next review date
- maintaining a repository/document library of current University-wide policies

The People and Culture directorate is responsible for:

- advising policy author on an appropriate engagement plan for consultations
- overseeing and supporting the equality screening process
- engagement and consultation with the Trade Unions and Health, Safety and Well-being committees
- engagement in the public equality screening consultation exercises
- guidance and support for any training requirements identified

Policies that are no longer current working practice will be withdrawn, archived and removed from OUS and shared sites. A copy of all archived policies will be retained for future reference and audit purposes by the OUS.

## 2. The Policy Framework

The Framework consists of the following:

1. Definitions
2. Policy Development and Approval Routes
3. Communication, implementation and training
4. Accessibility
5. Review Process
6. Policy Development Process diagram
7. Policy Template

### 1. Definitions

Below are proposed definitions of official documents based on those currently used both within the University and across the sector.

#### ***Code of Practice***

Advisory document which supports a policy/regulation and can include expectations of behaviour and/or good practice.

#### ***Equality Impact Assessment***

An equality impact assessment is a thorough and systematic analysis of a policy, whether that policy is formal or informal, and irrespective of the scope of that policy. The primary function of an equality impact assessment is to determine the extent of any differential impact of a policy upon the Section 75<sup>1</sup> categories and to determine if the differential impact is an adverse impact. An equality impact assessment can assist in decision-making and improve policy making by adding to the evidence base available.

#### ***Guidelines/Guidance/Guide***

An advisory document that indicates a course of action to be followed and/or provides detailed practical advice on a particular area/activity.

#### ***Policy***

A written statement which defines the University's position or strategy in regard to its core processes. A policy defines the parameters for decision-making and clarifies compliance issues for staff and students.

#### ***Policy screening***

Policy screening is a process to identify those policies that are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations. Screening enables the institution to identify those policies which are more relevant to the Section 75 statutory duties and on that account be considered for an equality impact assessment. It also helps to identify policies which offer better opportunities for the discharge of the Section 75 statutory duties for people in any of the equality or good relations categories. The Equality Screening Protocol is attached in the appendices.

#### ***Procedure/Protocol***

A description (involving linked action steps) of how to do something, to ensure consistency of practice. Often supports a Regulation or Policy. Developed with the user/customer in mind.

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<sup>1</sup> The Section 75 categories are religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation, sex, disability and dependants.

## **Regulation**

Sets out the University rule or standards governing an area.

## **Strategy Statement**

Sets out how the University will manage its resources and meet the aims detailed in the University Strategic Plan.

## **2. Policy Development and Approval Routes**

Policies must exist in written form. This is the only way that all parties can know what the policy is. Before a policy can be implemented and published, it must go through a development and approval process. The main steps for the development of a new or existing policy are shown in the policy development process diagram below.

### **New Policy/Review Initiation**

As a first step, the policy author is encouraged to outline a summary of the proposed policy (for feedback and endorsement with the policy owner if required). Things to consider when drafting this include:

- Rationale for the review/new policy (why are you looking at this issue? legislation; strategic objectives; review date for a current policy)
- What is this document trying to achieve?
- Who is the audience/stakeholders (staff, students, other stakeholders)? Why will they have an interest in this policy?
- Are there other policies in place that have relevance or impact on this policy?
- What other areas of legislation will affect the drafting of this policy? E.g. CCTV and data protection
- What are the potential equality impacts of this policy?
- Are there any data protection, freedom of information or IT implications with this policy?
- What are the resource implications for the implementation of the policy?
- Are there any strategic or financial implications to be considered?
- Does this policy address any identified risks?
- How does this policy relate to other departments/functions?
- What is the approvals route for this policy?
- What are the training requirements for the effective implementation of the policy?
- Does the Policy comply with relevant legislation and the Charter, Statutes, Ordinances and Regulations of the University?
- How will adherence be monitored?
- Will the Policy impact on the health, safety and/or well-being of staff, students or others?

### **Consultation**

Consultation with key stakeholders should be carried out when drafting a policy. This may take the form of meetings/presentations and feedback sessions with a defined working group, feedback from colleagues, advice from the EDI team on Section 75 adherence, and/or discussion and feedback from other departments who may be aligned to the policy.

### ***How and when to engage with staff and other stakeholders***

Policy development should be a collaborative exercise involving a broad range of stakeholders. Early engagements should take place to ensure that the Policy author fully understands the needs and expectations of the users of the policy. This should take place while the policy is at a formative stage.

The format of the engagement may vary depending on the nature of the policy. Here are some examples of engagement techniques that Policy author may wish to consider:

- **Campus Conversations:** The Policy author may wish to arrange open campus based events at which staff may input to the development of the policy. In some cases, it may be appropriate to present an initial outline of the policy for discussion and in other cases it may be more appropriate to pose consultation questions for discussion.

Campus conversations are most appropriate where a policy potentially impacts on all staff or relates to a core strategy for the University.

- **Surveys/Questionnaires:** The Policy author may wish to seek views of staff via a survey or questionnaire.
- **Targeted meetings with key stakeholders:** This approach is most appropriate where the policy does not impact on all staff but has implications for specific stakeholder groups.
- **Focus Groups:** This can be a very effective method of testing the potential impact of a policy and initial reaction to policy proposals.

It is very important that staff receive feedback following the initial engagement. As the policy develops, staff and other stakeholders should receive regular updates on progress. The approach should be ‘**you said, we did**’.”

Policy authors should work with the Employee Relations team within the People and Culture Directorate to develop an engagement plan at an early stage of policy development.

### ***How and when to engage with the trade unions***

The Trade Unions are key partners in policy development. Trade unions help managers better understand the impact of policies on employees. The Employee Relations team will provide guidance on policy presentation to the monthly Policy Implementation Review group, which will in turn determine the trade union consultation requirements; the flowchart at Appendix 2 provides an outline of this process.

Consultation with the trade unions should take place while the policy is at a formative stage. Where a new policy is to be developed or an existing policy reviewed, the trade unions should be notified at an early stage and given an indication of the format of the consultation. Policy authors should seek advice on this from the Employee Relations team.

The format of the consultation will vary depending on the nature of the policy. In this regard Policy authors may wish to consider policies in the following categories:

1. Policies that impact on the main terms and conditions of employment
2. Policies that impact on the working practices of employees

3. Strategies and policies relating to core business of the University
4. Policies relating to regulatory or legislative requirement
5. Policies relating to health, safety and wellbeing

For policies in categories 1 and 2, consultation should take place at trade union consultation forums known as JNCs and JUCNCs. Policy authors should consult with the Employee Relations team to have their policy included on the agenda for a JNC.

For strategies and policies in category 3, there should be formal consultation with the trade unions. This can take place either at JNC meetings or a single item agenda meeting between the Policy author and the trade unions.

For policies at category 4, consultation should take place at a single item agenda meeting between the Policy author and the trade unions. The Employee Relations team can help facilitate the meeting.

For policies at category 5, consultation must take place through the health, safety and wellbeing committee structures.

More information on Trade Unions and a diary of scheduled meetings is available from the Employee Relations team.

## **Equality Screening**

In line with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the University is required to ensure that its policies are reviewed to assess their likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations on specific groups of people (i.e. the Section 75 categories). As part of the review process, the policy reviewer must contact the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion](#) team within People and Culture to get advice on equality screening requirements. Staff in EDI will assist the policy owner to complete a screening pro-forma and initial screening decision. This decision will help inform the next steps in the process.

Any potential adverse/negative impacts identified during screening must be taken in to consideration when drafting/revising a policy, so that they can be mitigated during policy development. Alternatively, if the screening concludes that a policy is likely to have a major potential to impact on equality of opportunity, it may be subject to a full equality impact assessment (EQIA)

Equality screening should not be seen as a single event in the policy development process, rather it should be embedded through-out the process. It may be necessary to conduct a screening at several stages in the development of the policy. Equality screening is not solely about the completion of a screening report, rather it is intended to ensure that equality considerations are deeply rooted in the think of policy makers.

The draft screening document should be retained by the policy owner and provided to the representative trade unions during internal consultation on the policy.

## **Policy Document Approval routes**

Policies are formally approved by the relevant governing body (SLT, Senate or Council) or by a senior officer operating under its delegated authority as defined in the University's [delegated authority framework](#).

The delegated authority framework sets out where authority rests within the University for key decisions made on behalf of the organisation. It is designed to streamline decision making, ensuring that decisions are not escalated above a level where there is sufficient expertise and experience to make the decision.

In addition, Appendix 3 provides a set of guidelines in relation to the level of consultation and approvals needed for the different types of governance and policy documents within the University.

Where minor changes for existing policies are planned, the policy author should consult the policy owner and the University Secretary, or the Director of People and Culture for policies relating to HSW, over the consultation and approval process to be followed. Normally, it should be possible for minor changes to be approved by the Chair on behalf of the appropriate approving body.

If unsure about the appropriate consultation and approval process, the policy author should seek advice from the University Secretary, or the Director of People and Culture.

A policy will be effective from the date of approval, if not otherwise specified. However, the policy owner must bear in mind that changes may need to be made to the policy if any substantive feedback (in terms of equality impact) is received during the public policy screening consultation exercise.

To meet the desire for uniformity of all Policy documents, policy owners are asked to follow as far as is practicable, the Policy template attached when reviewing or drafting policies. In all cases a new/revised policy must be accompanied by a cover sheet.

### **3. Communication, Implementation and Training**

The policy owner has responsibility for the effective communication and implementation of the policy to the relevant target audience(s). The owner should liaise with People & Culture to assist with the development of support and training options, if appropriate, for policy users to ensure awareness, understanding and compliance with the policy across the University.

### **4. Storage and Accessibility**

To improve the awareness of and accessibility to University policy documents for staff and other interested parties, all university wide policies will be linked from one central location on Sharepoint to the Office of the University Secretary webpage and the relevant departmental webpages; a link to departmental websites from the Office of the University Secretary webpage will also be established. Each department is responsible for ensuring that its policies are up to date on this repository.

## **5. Review Process**

It is important to keep all policies under continuous review to ensure that they remain relevant in the context of the strategic plan, fit for purpose and legally compliant.

It is recommended that policies are informally reviewed annually, with a formal review at least every five years. However, in some cases review may be required earlier if there is a legislative or regulatory requirement or a change in strategy.

In deciding which policies to review and when, policies should be prioritised in terms of risk profile and issues addressed, in agreement with the policy owner.

In the preparation and review of a policy, the reviewer should consider sector practice as well as external requirements.

Policy owners are also reminded that policies are to be reviewed two years post initial equality screening to assess impact on equality of opportunity and good relations, in line with the University's Equality Scheme.

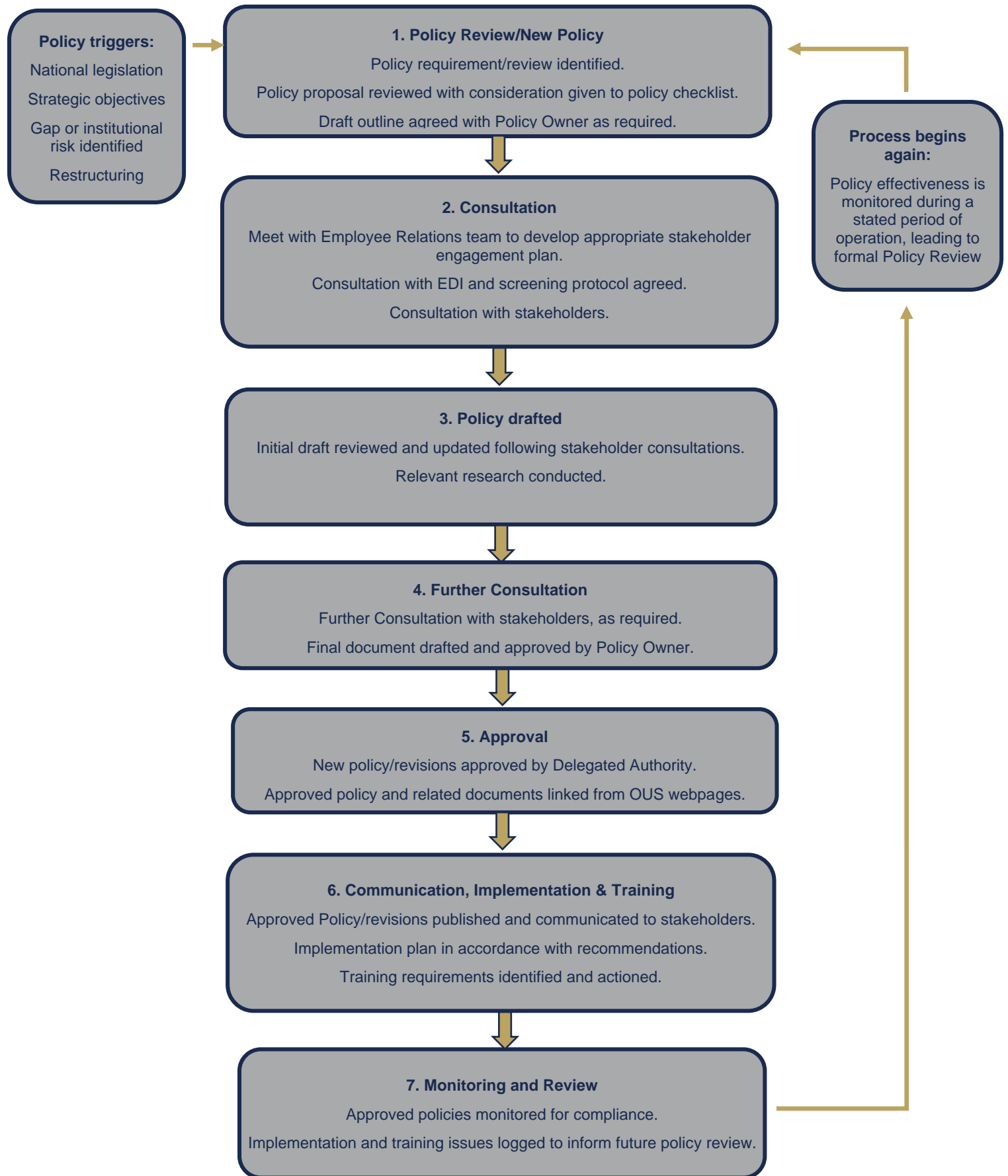
It is the responsibility of the policy owner to set the formal policy review date, advise the Office of the University Secretary of the review date, and complete the review at the appropriate time. A reviewed policy will have a new version number.

### **Policy Withdrawal**

Should a Policy owner determine that a particular policy is no longer valid or relevant, and s/he proposes to remove the policy from the repository, the policy and rationale for removal will be presented to the delegated authority for approval. On approval the policy will be removed from the repository and a copy of the approval sent to the University Secretary and Equality Diversity and Inclusion lead.



## 6. Policy Development Process Diagram



## 7. Policy Template

A Policy document should include:

- Cover Page
- University name, logo, document title and version number in the header of each page
- Page number in the footer section of every page
- A main body of text, to include:
  - Policy Title
  - Aims, Purpose and Scope
  - Definitions
  - Policy Statement
  - Communication, Implementation and training
  - Complaints procedure
  - Relevant legislation
  - Related policy documents referenced
  - Contact details

### ***Writing style for policies***

Policies are the guidance documents and tools that set out and define the parameters for decision making. When putting together a policy document please ensure that your document is:

- User/People centric
- Written in plain English
- Easy to understand/follow
- Meaningful and effective

Policies should confirm to the checklists/style guides provided by the Communications team via the following link:

- <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/communications-toolkit>

## COVER PAGE

Policy Name	
Version number	
Policy Owner and Department	Policy Author/Reviewer
Approving body	Date of approval
Version approval date	Equality Screened
	Next Review date
<p>Queries relating to this document should be directed to the Policy Owner – name and email.</p> <p>This document can be made available on request, in alternative formats including Braille, computer disc, audiocassette, and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English.</p>	

## **Title**

*Ensure the title is as concise and descriptive of policy content as possible.*

## **Introduction and Background**

*This section is optional and is generally not required for most policies. It should only be included where necessary to provide context for the policy which would not be appropriate in the main body of the policy.*

## **Aims, Purpose and Scope of the Policy**

*Identify:*

- *Aims: What the policy is intended to do*
- *Purpose: what business or statutory need does it meet*
- *Scope: the areas of activity covered by the policy; who must be aware of and comply with the policy.*

## **Definitions**

*Define:*

- *Terms: those that may require interpretation or definition*
- *Timescales: (optional) define reasonable timescale for compliance, or set out any specific timescales required by law*

## **Policy Statement**

*Provide a concise statement of the University's policy, including guiding principles, values and expectations for the given policy area. The policy statement should communicate clearly how the policy is broadly intended to be applied and may refer to a set of procedures for implementing the policy and detailed separately. Where necessary the statement should identify action to be taken and timelines (if relevant), reporting or documentation required, and follow up actions if applicable, for example statutory returns, reports to senior management or governing body or evaluation.*

## **Communication, Implementation and training**

*Outline how the policy will be implemented across the University. Outline the communication tools to be used (email; webinar; e-zine; presentation etc). Detail any relevant or required training, who will provide it and when.*

## **Complaints procedure**

*If the policy requires a complaints procedure, provide details.*

## **Relevant Legislation**

*Provide background to the relevant legislation.*

## **Related Policy Documents**

*Provide details and hyperlinks to any other relevant University policies, procedures, guidance notes.*

## **Contacts and Further Information**

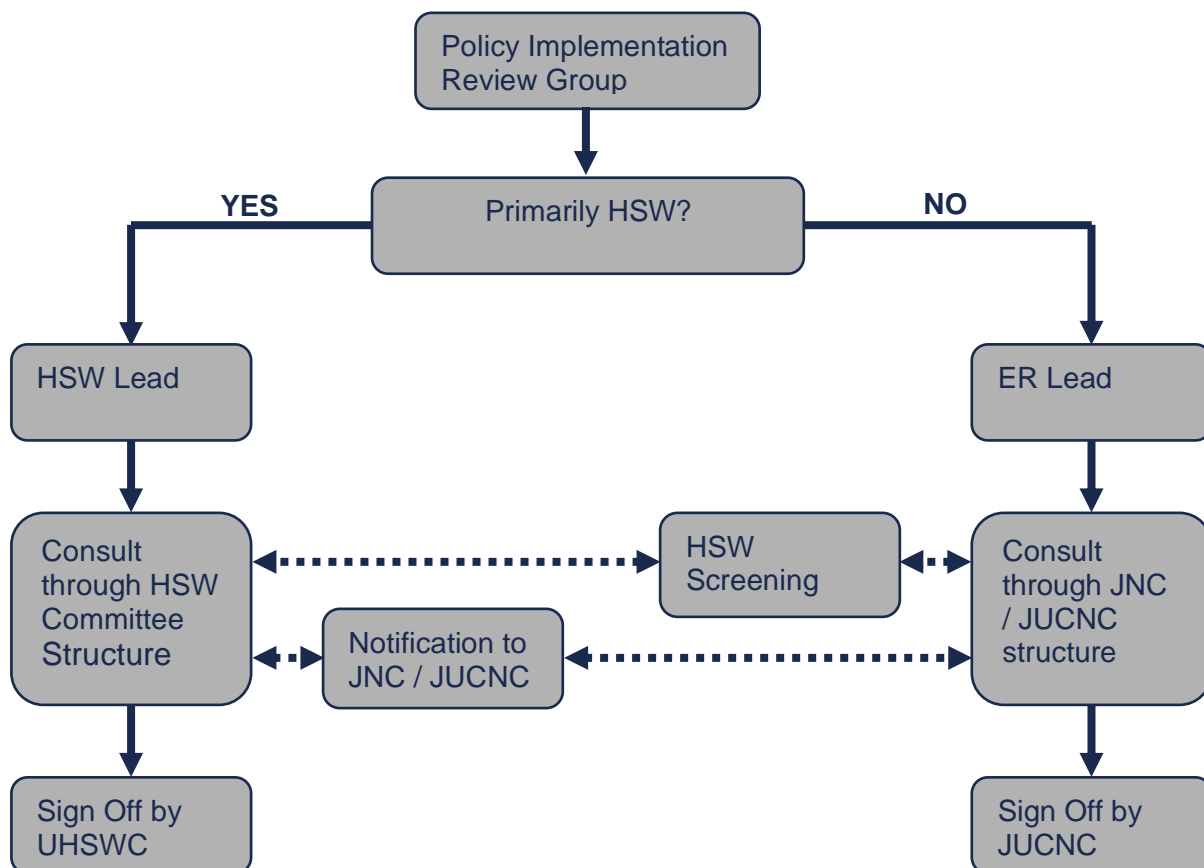
*Provide contact details for the University department responsible for overseeing the implementation of and ensuring compliance with the policy. This should include the name and email address of at least one person who can answer questions about the policy. Provide hyperlinks to any useful internal or external sources of information.*

## Appendix 1: Policy Screening Protocol 2021



For assistance with policy screening please contact Angela Getty (Ext 68869)

## Appendix 2: HSWC and JUCNC roles



The Policy Implementation Review Group will determine the most appropriate “consultation” (primarily HSW) or “negotiation” (not primarily HSW) channel at the outset. Responsibility for “final sign-off” will therefore be determined at that stage.

Cross referencing will occur for **all** policies with non-HSW policies “screened” by JNCs and notified to HSWC and vice-versa for HSW policies.

Occasionally, but importantly, some policies, e.g. Sickness Absence Policy will require sign off by both UHSWC and JUCNC. Again, this will be agreed with the TUs at the outset.

### Appendix 3: Guidelines on types of governance and policy documents, and consultation and approval requirements

Document Type	Purpose	Formal Consultation required	Approval
Charter	Defines the governance of the University: its objects, statutes, ordinances, regulations, officers and powers including those that allow the awarding of degrees	Senate in relation to academic matters  Trade Unions in relation to provisions impacting on staff	Privy Council, on recommendation of Council and University Secretary  Reviewed when necessary
Statutes	Provides the fundamental constitutional and governance provisions of the University and are ultimately subject to approval by the Privy Council  Compliance is mandatory	Senate in relation to academic matters  Trade Unions in relation to Statutes impacting on staff	Privy Council, on recommendation of Council and University Secretary  Reviewed when necessary
Ordinances	In support of the Statutes, Ordinances provide regulations and procedures governing aspects of University business  Compliance is mandatory	Senate through PVC Education in relation to academic matters  Trade Unions in relation to Ordinances impacting on staff	Council, on recommendation from Senate in relation to academic matters and the Senior Leadership Team in relation to other matters  Periodic Review every [4] years (with Annual Review)
Regulations	Set out the University rules, conduct or standards governing an area.  Compliance is mandatory	Students in relation to academic regulations  Trade Unions in relation to regulations impacting on staff  Senate through PVC Education in relation to regulations impacting on academic staff	Academic Regulations are normally approved by Senate, except where this has been delegated to a Committee or University Officer  Regulations relating to staff and other resources are approved by the Council or its Committees.  Regulations are subject to annual review

<p>Policies</p>	<p>A clear and precise statement expressing the position of the University on an issue of institution-wide importance or how the University intends to conduct its services, actions or business</p> <p>Sets out requirements and restrictions, and establishes standards, rights and responsibilities that generally apply across the University</p> <p>Helps to focus attention and resources on high priority issues</p> <p>Defines what the rule is rather than how to implement it</p> <p>Reduces institutional risk</p> <p>Compliance is mandatory</p>	<p>Form of consultation will depend on policy and area of operation. Employee Relations team to advise on stakeholder engagement plan</p> <p>EDI team to advise on equality screening</p> <p>Mandatory for new policy or significant amendments which have significant impact on large proportion of University population, or where recommended by People &amp; Culture</p>	<p>Council, Senate (for academic strategies) or Senior Leadership Team, except where this has been delegated to a Committee or University Officer</p> <p>Annual review to confirm accuracy, relevance and fitness for purpose.</p> <p>Formal review at least every 5 years or as legislation/circumstances dictate.</p> <p>Reviewed in terms of impact on equality of opportunity and good relations every 2 years post implementation</p>
<p>Procedure</p>	<p>A written set of instructions that describe the approved and recommended steps for implementing a regulation or policy across the University.</p> <p>Establishes the purpose of the activity and who is responsible for the action.</p> <p>Communicates acceptable practice and sets boundaries</p> <p>Helps to ensure consistency of practice by setting out a step by step process for conducting the activity or service.</p>	<p>Staff and students where appropriate</p>	<p>Executive Policy Owner</p>



	<p>Useful for training, and process review/ improvement initiatives.</p> <p>Could be a few bullet points, instructions, forms, checklists, instructions and/or flowcharts.</p> <p>Procedures are expected to evolve over time as new tools/technology emerge, new processes are designed, and the risks associated with an area change in response to internal or external environmental developments.</p> <p>There should be an expectation that individuals will “challenge” outdated procedures and call them to the attention of their owners.</p> <p>Compliance is mandatory</p>		<p>Annual review to confirm accuracy, relevance and fitness for purpose.</p> <p>Formal review at least every 5 years or as legislation/circumstances dictate</p> <p>Reviewed in terms of impact on equality of opportunity and good relations every 2 years post implementation</p>
Code of Practice	<p>A set of written rules and standards which help all staff understand and comply with a policy or regulation</p> <p>Compliance is mandatory</p>	Staff and/or students if the Code of Practice could have a significant impact	<p>Executive Policy Owner</p> <p>Periodic Review Every 5 Years (with Annual Review)</p>
Guidelines/ Guide/ User Guide	<p>Help, advice and support for a particular activity or service</p> <p>Compliance is recommended, but not mandatory</p>	Staff and students where appropriate	<p>Executive Policy Owner</p> <p>Periodic Review Every 5 Years (with Annual Review)</p>