University of Sussex Policy Template – guidance notes

The approved University policy template can be found here – **this must be used as the base for all policies at the University**. When using this template, please also ensure that you have read the University's Policy on the Creation and Management of University Policies ('Policy Framework') and please refer to this guidance.

University policies should contain each of the following section headings and any other headings should be included in the policy as sub-headings beneath these rather than additional sections. Information about what should be included in each section is outlined below.

1. Overview and Purpose

- Provide background and context for the policy
- 'Set the scene'
- This section can be used to make clear why the policy is important to the University; how the policy aligns with or flows from the University's values; what drives the policy (e.g. regulatory or compliance obligations, strategy, etc)
- Lay out main aims of the policy and what it will cover
- Use plain, straightforward language to ensure clarity and accessibility
- Keep this section relatively brief and avoid including the actual 'content' of the policy here

2. Scope

- Include details of who/what is covered by the policy (or, similarly, who or what specifically is not covered by the policy – e.g. students)
- Who needs to read/adhere to the policy?
- Some definitions may be appropriate to include here (e.g. what is meant by certain terms or phrases for the purposes of this policy, if used throughout; if you are using broad terms like 'staff' and 'students,' ensure it is clear what is meant by this)

3. Responsibilities

- Outline key responsibilities of those covered by the policy – **N.B.** these responsibilities should be only in relation to this policy itself (i.e. do not just outline what an individual's / team's / committee's general role is at the University more broadly)
- These should be broken down by role / area of the University as required, and you should organise these in a logical order (e.g. ascending order in terms of seniority of staff, general – 'all staff' – to specific roles, descending order in terms of significance)
- If individuals or groups of people have specific responsibilities under a policy, you need to be sure that there is a mechanism in place by which they are made aware of this

4. Policy

The most important point here is to avoid including too much practical, technical, or logistical detail in the policy document itself. Always consider whether something may be more appropriately placed in supporting documents such as procedures, processes, guidance, etc (which can be updated / changed on an ad hoc basis, unlike the policy, which should be less likely to need frequent review or amendment).

Supporting documents can be used to explain how to adhere to, or comply with, the policy in practice – for example, details of a business process in place at the University which supports the policy, or a guidance on how to report an issue relating to matters covered in the policy.

If a process or procedure must be followed or adhered to in order to comply with the policy, this can and should be stated in the policy – but the details of this process or procedure itself should not form part of the policy.

Please refer to the Policy Framework for definitions of various types of supporting documents.

Please see below for some other guidance about what to include in this section:

- Include the actual details of the policy here, including – where applicable – a summary of any legislation or regulatory compliance framework that informs the policy
- The 'policy' section should be used to cover things like the key principles which underpin the University's position, outlining the University's position on a matter, details of the University's obligations / promises / intentions, actions the University requires, etc.
- Definitions can also be included within the body of the policy as necessary, but it can also sometimes be more appropriate to insert these as footnotes (so as to keep the policy itself more streamlined)
- Consequences / impacts of non-compliance with (breaches of) the policy can be included here
- Make reference to other internal documents / pages / processes as necessary here, but do not link them in the body of the policy; anything mentioned should instead be linked in the 'Review / Contacts / References' box at the end of the policy (this will make these links easier to update in future and will avoid the risk of broken links further down the line)
- Refer to individuals by role titles not specific names, to avoid risk of policies becoming out of date more quickly in light of staff role changes / departures

5. Legislation and Good Practice

- Use this section to provide links to external sites – for example, related legislation posted on the gov.uk webpages, best practice information from organisations that work in the subject area, or any other helpful external links / documents

Review / Contacts / References Box

This box is to be included at the end of all policies and completed / updated each time a policy is written or revised and approved – sections should be completed as follows:

- *'Date approved'* should be the date the policy received its final approval from the approving group / committee / etc (the name of which should be entered next to *'Approving body'*)

- *'Last review date'* refers to the date the policy was last reviewed for accuracy and to ensure it was still up to date and fit for purpose

- *'Revision history'* refers to the times it was amended – the first time a policy is published, these should both read 'N/A,' but subsequently, starting with the date the policy was created, each date that it is amended (as applicable) should be entered here as a month and year, from most recent to oldest, along with any version details

- *'Next review date'* should be 3 years from the date approved as standard (unless the review period is anything other than standard, as outlined in the Policy Framework)

- *'Related internal policies, procedures, and guidance'* is the section where links to anything internal referred to in the policy should be included – e.g. specific supporting documents (procedural or process documents, practical guidance on how to implement / adhere to the policy, guidance), links to reporting forms, other relevant/related policies, etc.

- The roles of *'Policy Owner'* and *'Point of Contact'* are outlined in the Policy Framework – remember that you should primarily use role titles here (particularly for the Policy Owner), rather than individuals' names (to ensure continuity over time, should individuals leave the University or change roles, for example) – though an individual name can additionally be provided for the Point of Contact along with their role if this is helpful (though this should be updated as necessary should this change).

General Tips

- Refer to the University Policy Framework; use the University Policy Template (& consult the most up to date guidance)

- Get in touch with Karen at the outset when writing a new policy or reviewing/amending an existing policy for advice around use of the Template and adherence to the Framework

- Consult with all relevant colleagues for input when initially starting to draft – e.g. OGC, if there is a legal angle; colleagues in other areas if the policy relates to their work

- Give consideration to the following areas/matters (as relevant) when drafting your policy:

    - Changes relating to the move to Faculties
    - Legal, regulatory or compliance requirements including any legislative changes
    - Academic Freedom / Freedom of Speech implications
    - Value for Money implications and our Value for Money commitments
    - Business continuity or risk management issues
    - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion issues and whether an Equality Impact Assessment might be needed
    - Alignment with the University Strategy
    - Climate change risks

- Make of list bullet points (key information you want to include) and then group under the headings used on the University Policy Template to help you organise yourself before writing

- Cross-reference with related policies to check for consistency

- Get someone who isn't a subject matter expert in your area to review solely for 'the basics' / flow / readability

- If using acronyms, ensure the full words are written out the first time they are referred to, e.g. 'FOI ('Freedom of Information')'

- Hold a master Word document of the policy for future amendments and always draft/update in Word and convert to PDF once finalised

- Use a single URL to host the policy on the webpage (so there is only one published version at any given time)

- Use the PDF accessibility checker before finalising your policy and make any amendments as needed

Accessibility

Policies should be drafted as Word documents and, once approved, converted into PDFs. As per University guidance provided by the Web Team, PDFs serve a purpose where something may need to be printed out or stored on record (such as a policy).

To ensure that documents are accessible, there is some guidance here; please see below for details of how to check the finished PDF for accessibility.

To check your PDF document for accessibility in Adobe:

- Select the Accessibility tab from the right-hand toolbox or select View > Tools > Accessibility > Open to bring up the Accessibility menu

- Click Accessibility Check to open the Accessibility checker options panel

- Ensure the Create accessibility report box is not ticked

- The report will appear on the left of the screen and highlight any issues with the document, any areas with issues will be highlighted in bold and have a bracketed number after them

- Right-clicking on an issue will open a dialogue box with guidance to fix the issue

Last reviewed / updated 24 March 2025