
THE OXFORD CENTRE FOR RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE

E3 PUBLIC INTEREST GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES

1. Purpose

OCRPL is committed to governance that serves its charitable purposes, protects the interests of students and other stakeholders, supports academic integrity and quality, and promotes responsible stewardship of the organisation's resources.

These principles bring together the standards OCRPL expects to apply across its governance, academic activity, student relationships, partnerships and public communications. They should be read alongside OCRPL's governing documents and other approved policies.

2. Institutional context

- a. OCRPL operates as an Independent Alternate Provider of Higher Education (IAPHE), delivering education through online and virtual modes.
- b. OCRPL offers and supports learning from certificate-level studies to doctoral programmes, including programmes delivered with partner and awarding universities.
- c. OCRPL does not itself hold degree-awarding powers. Where a university award is offered, the award is made by the relevant partner or awarding university.
- d. OCRPL is not registered with the Office for Students (OfS) and is not a member of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).
- e. OCRPL does not issue a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) and does not act as a UK Student sponsor.
- f. OCRPL works with relevant accreditation and quality-assurance agencies and partner institutions in support of academic standards, quality and continuous improvement.

3. Principle 1 - Academic freedom and responsible inquiry

OCRPL supports lawful academic inquiry, critical reflection and responsible scholarly debate. Academic staff and students should be able to question received ideas, test arguments, consider alternative interpretations and express academically relevant views without improper disadvantage merely because a view is unpopular or controversial.

This commitment operates within the law and within legitimate requirements relating to academic standards, professional conduct, safeguarding, confidentiality, equality, contractual duties and OCRPL's stated Christian identity and charitable purposes.

OCRPL's Christian ethos may be stated openly and transparently, while academic discussion and research should be handled with intellectual integrity, fairness and respect for evidence.

4. Principle 2 - Accountability and integrity

OCRPL will seek to operate openly, honestly, accountably and with integrity. The Trustees retain ultimate responsibility for governance and stewardship, subject to the governing documents and applicable law.

- a. Decisions should be properly authorised, documented and made for OCRPL's charitable purposes.
- b. Information supplied to students, partners, accreditation or quality-assurance agencies, funders, regulators and the public should be accurate and not misleading.
- c. Restricted funds and grants should be used for the purposes for which they were given.
- d. Conflicts of interest and related-party matters should be declared and managed appropriately.
- e. Material risks, compliance concerns and significant incidents should be escalated through the appropriate governance route.

5. Principle 3 - Student engagement

OCRPL will provide meaningful opportunities for students to give feedback and contribute to the review and improvement of their educational experience.

- a. Student engagement methods may include representatives, surveys, online forums, meetings, module or programme feedback and direct consultation.
- b. Engagement arrangements should be proportionate to OCRPL's size, online and virtual delivery model and student population.
- c. OCRPL should record significant student feedback, the response given and, where appropriate, improvements made.
- d. Where a matter is controlled by a partner or awarding university, students should be directed to the appropriate engagement or representation route.

6. Principle 4 - Academic governance and quality

The Trustees receive assurance that OCRPL's academic governance is appropriate to the educational responsibilities it actually holds. The Academic Council and Programme Heads operate within the authority delegated to them under OCRPL's governance and partnership arrangements.

- a. OCRPL's academic governance supports programme development, learning and teaching, research, academic integrity, supervision, student support, programme monitoring and continuous improvement.
- b. Where a partner or awarding university retains responsibility for academic standards, assessment, progression, examination, award or academic appeals, those responsibilities remain with that institution.
- c. OCRPL should not represent itself as exercising degree-awarding or other academic powers that belong to a partner or awarding institution.
- d. Quality assurance is supported by internal review, student feedback, partner-university requirements and engagement with relevant accreditation and quality-assurance agencies.

7. Principle 5 - Risk management and continuity

OCRPL will maintain proportionate risk-management and internal-control arrangements appropriate to its charitable activities, online and virtual delivery model, finances, academic responsibilities and partnerships.

- a. Material strategic, financial, academic, partnership, technology, cyber, safeguarding, data, people and reputational risks should be identified and reviewed.
- b. Online learning continuity, system resilience, data availability and supplier dependence should form part of OCRPL's risk and continuity planning.
- c. Student-protection arrangements should address material risks to continuation of study.
- d. The Trustees should receive appropriate assurance on significant risks and corrective actions.

8. Principle 6 - Value, affordability and fair treatment

OCRPL seeks to provide educational opportunities that are appropriately resourced, transparently priced and fair to students.

- a. Fees and unavoidable charges should be communicated clearly before a student enters into a contract.
- b. Public statements about affordability, comparative price or value should be accurate and capable of support.
- c. Programme quality, student support, sustainability and affordability should be considered together when fees and resources are reviewed.
- d. Refund, compensation and student-protection arrangements should be clear and applied consistently.
- e. Where public, charitable or restricted funds are used, OCRPL should manage them in accordance with the relevant terms and purposes.

9. Principle 7 - Freedom of expression within the law

OCRPL supports freedom of expression within the law and encourages respectful, informed discussion across its online learning community, academic activities and public events.

This does not create an unrestricted right to expression. OCRPL may apply lawful and proportionate requirements relating to safety, safeguarding, confidentiality, harassment, discrimination, defamation, intellectual property, academic standards, contractual obligations and the proper conduct of its activities.

Restrictions should not be imposed merely because a lawful viewpoint is unpopular or controversial. Where a material restriction is necessary, the decision should be based on a legitimate reason and applied proportionately.

10. Principle 8 - Effective governing body

The composition, skills, experience and working arrangements of the Trustees should remain appropriate to OCRPL's charitable purposes, scale, online and virtual delivery model, programme portfolio, partnerships and risk environment.

- a. Trustee appointments and reappointments should follow OCRPL's governing documents and applicable eligibility requirements.
- b. The Trustees should periodically consider skills, succession, conflicts, diversity of perspective and governance effectiveness.
- c. The Executive Team, Academic Council, committees and delegated roles should operate within clear authority and reporting arrangements.
- d. Governance effectiveness should be reviewed periodically and improvement actions tracked.

11. Principle 9 - Eligibility, fitness and conflicts

Trustees, senior leaders and others exercising significant responsibility should meet the legal and organisational requirements applicable to their role and should act with honesty, integrity and appropriate competence.

- a. Trustee and director eligibility and disqualification requirements should be checked on appointment and as appropriate thereafter.
- b. Relevant conflicts of interest should be declared, recorded and managed.
- c. Concerns about conduct, eligibility, integrity or conflicts should be considered through the appropriate governance process.
- d. OCRPL should not describe charity, tax or other eligibility checks as OfS 'fit and proper' requirements.

12. Principle 10 - Partnership responsibility and transparency

Because OCRPL delivers programmes in partnership with universities and other academic institutions, public-interest governance requires clear allocation of responsibility.

- a. Material partnerships should be supported by written agreements and appropriate due diligence.
- b. Student-facing information should identify the awarding university or other authorised awarding institution where applicable.
- c. Responsibilities for recruitment, registration, teaching, supervision, assessment, progression, award, complaints, appeals, fees, refunds, data and continuity should be clear.
- d. OCRPL should review significant partnerships periodically and address material risks or performance concerns.
- e. Public statements should distinguish OCRPL's own role from the role of accreditation, quality-assurance and awarding bodies.

13. Principle 11 - Transparency and public benefit

OCRPL will seek to provide clear public information about its legal status, charitable purposes, educational role, partnerships and governance.

- a. Institutional and programme descriptions should be accurate and kept under review.
- b. OCRPL should not describe itself as a university, degree-awarding body, OfS-registered provider, OIA member or Student sponsor unless its status formally changes.
- c. Charitable resources and decisions should be directed toward OCRPL's objects and public benefit.
- d. Annual reports, accounts and other information required by law should be prepared and filed through the appropriate channels.

14. Evidence and review

OCRPL should be able to demonstrate that these principles operate in practice through appropriate governance records, policies, minutes, risk and financial records, academic and quality reports, student feedback, partnership evidence and improvement actions.

The Trustees will review these principles periodically and sooner where there is a material change to OCRPL's legal status, governance, educational model, partnerships, accreditation or quality-assurance arrangements, or applicable law.

15. Related OCRPL documents and arrangements

- a. E1 Management and Governance Statement;
- b. Memorandum and Articles of Association and valid resolutions/byelaws;
- c. GRC / Risk Management arrangements;
- d. C1 Consumer Protection and Student Fairness Policy;
- e. C2 Student Complaints Procedure;
- f. C3 Student Protection Plan;
- g. C5 / current Student Terms and Conditions;
- h. C6 Refund and Compensation Policy;
- i. applicable safeguarding, privacy, data-protection and records-management arrangements;
- j. partner and awarding-university agreements; and
- k. accreditation and quality-assurance arrangements.

16. Approval

These Public Interest Governance Principles are approved by the Trustees and form part of OCRPL's public governance framework.