

## INTRODUCTION TO THE 7 PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE - OVERVIEW

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### What are the Principles?

The 7 principles, also known as the Nolan principles, is made up of a set of values which must be upheld by anybody in a position of public office.

- ▶▶ Selflessness – holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
- ▶▶ Integrity – holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
- ▶▶ Objectivity - holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- ▶▶ Accountability - holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- ▶▶ Openness - holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
- ▶▶ Honesty - holders of public office should be truthful.
- ▶▶ Leadership - holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life>

If you hold any public office position, you are expected to understand and adhere to the principles.

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# THE 7 PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

## Does it apply to the education sector?

These principles apply to any person in an elected position of public office, and this includes the education sector.

The 'Governance Handbook' states that governors and others involved with governance should accept and adhere to the 7 principles. It also points out that boards "should be mindful that in exercising all their functions, they must act with integrity, objectivity and in the best interests of the school; and be open about the decisions they make and the actions they take and be prepared to explain their decisions and actions to interested parties" (4.1.2)

### Selflessness

Governors should actively behave in an ethical manner, as opposed to just avoiding acting with selfish intentions.

### Integrity

Governors should make decisions based on evidence and free from any 'inappropriate' influence. There should also be transparency when conveying decisions to stakeholders.

### Objectivity

Although there can be pressures and complications that occur as part of the job, governors must ensure objectivity is maintained. There should be a trail of evidence making, which in turn protects the board against any accusations of bias. It is a good idea to maintain a diverse and varied board, in order to ensure that objectivity is retained throughout the entire process.

### Accountability

Governing boards should know who they are accountable and how to hold themselves open to this. Maintain an audit trail.

### Openness

Transparency is a key part of maintaining the principles. Boards should publish meet any statutory requirements that they are subject to, as well as additional information such as minutes, accounts of activities, policies, and any other relevant information. This helps to maintain a good relationship between stakeholders and the board. Additionally, boards also need to strike a good balance between safeguarding confidential information and still adhering to these principles, and it should be considered how to do this.

### Honesty

This should underpin any approach to governance, and it is important to note that maintaining honesty with stakeholders can help to smooth over difficult or unpopular decisions. To demonstrate this, senior leaders, trustees, and governors should complete a declaration of business interest form, outline any conflicts of interest which may impede their performance in their role.

### Leadership

Governors should be role models for other leaders and teachers, and any inappropriate behaviour should be dealt with as if it was another member of staff.



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