

## PUBLIC INTEREST GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES

As an English Higher Education Provider, OCRPL recognises its responsibility, and is fully committed, to adhere to public interest governance principles. Some of the following are restatements found in other policies and strategies that govern the activities of our organisation. They have been brought together, in this document, for clarity and convenience of reference. This document has been agreed by the Board of Directors.

### 1. Academic Freedom

*Academic staff at OCRPL have freedom within the law:*

- *to question and test received wisdom; and*
- *to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions;*

*without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at the provider.*

OCRPL fully endorses the principle of academic freedom. Our commitment to academic excellence includes a commitment to the freedom of academic expression.

In the course of their research, students and staff are encouraged to explore, critically, a range of viewpoints, and to come to their own conclusions. Whilst OCRPL, as part of a broader Christian community, holds a particular doctrinal position, this does not impose limits on the research into and expression of academically viable alternatives. Any concerns of discrimination in this area will be reported, initially, to the Academic Dean, and this will be followed up, at first informally, and where necessary through appropriate complaints and appeals procedures.

We affirm that where staff do question and test received wisdom or put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions (within the law), that will not put them in jeopardy of losing jobs or privileges, or cause them to face any other form of discrimination, on the basis of the views expressed, unless they expressly defy lawful employment instructions and seek to uphold those views over reasonable instruction given in view of their employment.

## 2. Accountability

*The provider operates openly, honestly, accountably and with integrity and demonstrates the values appropriate to be recognised as an English higher education provider.*

We are committed to complying with the conditions required of us as a Higher Education Provider. This includes:

- Subscribing to, and submitting data to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), subscribing to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), and receiving regular monitoring reviews, and being part of the complaints handling team operated by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).
- Operating an open and transparent policy with regard to admissions and student expectations, and to comply with the requirements of all relevant laws, including those relating to Consumer Protection and the issuing of Contracts.
- Ensuring that funds received are consistent with the purposes for which those funds were given, and to ensure that the appropriate financial management, governance and operational systems in place to deliver the designated courses.

We are committed to:

- Maintain high academic standards, in accordance with national expectations, and offer awards that are comparable with those attained in other Higher Education institutions.
- Offer to students, and continually seek to improve, high quality learning opportunities. This includes (but is not limited to):
  - Ensuring the knowledge, ability, experience and development of our teaching faculty;
  - Provision of appropriate learning resources; • A programme structure that meets the needs of students; and
  - An assessment strategy that is robust, fair, transparent, and ensures that students are properly rewarded for the work they do.



- Ensure that all students (including prospective students) are provided with good and accurate information about all aspects of OCRPL's study life, programmes and processes, and that communication between OCRPL and students is effective.
- Offer programmes and modules as advertised, wherever reasonably possible. Provision advertised will be correct, to the best of our knowledge at the time.
  - Where changes are necessary, these will be limited, and we will do our best to mitigate their effect and to offer appropriate alternatives.
  - Current and prospective students will be kept fully informed both of the changes and of options available following those changes.
- Provide all such opportunities as we can to enhance the quality of our provision, and the learning opportunities of students.
- Engage appropriately with students in the development, monitoring and review of programmes and assessment strategies to ensure that they are appropriate, realistic, and meet students' needs.
- Invite, receive and respond to feedback from students.
- Respond appropriately, and in a timely manner to students' complaints and appeals. Details of the Student Complaints and Appeals Procedure is available on the website.
- Play our part (alongside the University of Pretoria and Stellenbosch University) to meet standards and expectations set out in the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and the Quality Code.

### **3. Student engagement**

*The governing body ensures that all students have opportunities to engage with the governance of the provider, and that this allows for a range of perspectives to have influence.*

Student engagement is of paramount concern with regard to the effective governance of OCRPL. Currently, student engagement takes a variety of forms:

- Students elect two representatives for each year group to attend regular student faculty meetings (SFMs) where academic and non-academic issues relating to the wider student experience may be raised and discussed. These take place twice each semester. Further meetings will be arranged if requested by students.
- Written (anonymous) feedback on aspects of the programme and of specific modules. The latter currently take the form of questionnaires that are filled in during the last semester of each year.
- Informal conversations between students and staff, e.g. in personal formation groups
- Formal meetings between students and staff, usually related to a particular issue.

#### **4. Academic governance**

*The governing body receives and tests assurance that academic governance is adequate and effective through explicit protocols with the senate/ academic board (or equivalent).*

Responsibility for the academic management of OCRPL lies with the Senate, chaired by the Academic Dean/Head of Academic Provision.

The primary responsibilities of the Senate, including the extended special committees are:

- To set and maintain academic standards;
- To oversee OCRPL's Enhancement Policy and to implement the Enhancement Plan – including collecting and analysing management data, and reviewing its usefulness and the effectiveness of its use;
- To monitor and review academic programmes, and individual modules, in order to consider their continuing effectiveness and usefulness, and their compliance with the appropriate national standards;
- To ensure compliance with our obligations in relation to our organisational and programme agreements with our partner Universities;

- To review, monitor and improve the students' learning experience, including the availability of appropriate learning resources;
- To monitor and review the effectiveness of learning supervision;
- To receive, consider and respond to the reports by External Examiners, and other external bodies, such as QAA;
- To receive and discuss applications from the Admissions Department, and decide in principle whether or not to accept students subject to a satisfactory interview;
- To receive minutes of Meetings with Student Representatives, and consider any appropriate response.
- To consider proposals from the senior management of OCRPL, to discuss issues and where appropriate develop an action plan.
- To consider, discuss and implement the production of the Annual Monitoring Report
- To ensure compliance with equal opportunities in learning – including provision for students with disabilities.
- To monitor and review staff development;
- To monitor trends in applications, entry qualifications, results and completion rates. The BoS agenda includes detailed discussion relating to and implementation of the 'Enhancement Action Plan', which covers all aspects of our academic provision

Enhanced oversight delegated to special committees also include the monitoring and review of the relevance and effectiveness of our provision, student feedback and discussion of peer review of teaching.

## 5. Risk management

*The provider operates comprehensive corporate risk management and control arrangements (including for academic risk) to ensure the sustainability of the provider's operations, and its ability to continue to comply with all of its conditions of registration.*



Our Risk Management Strategies include a review of the major financial risks affecting the organisation, and steps taken to mitigate those risks, as follows:

- A system of internal control designed to provide reasonable, but not absolute, assurance against misstatement or loss, including annual budgets approved by the directors; regular review of financial reports;
- Committee structure operating under terms of reference;
- Charity specific insurance policies;
- Relevant Reserves policy and investment policy;
- Development and review of policies to ensure relevance.

This and other areas of risk and how we are seeking to manage and mitigate those risks are included in our 'Student Protection Plan'.

### **Value for Money**

*The governing body ensures that there are adequate and effective arrangements in place to provide transparency about value for money for students and (where a provider has access to the student support system or to grant funding) for taxpayers.*

As a Higher Education Provider, OCRPL takes seriously its responsibility to offer high quality academic provision that also represents value for money to students and, in the event of grand funding, to taxpayers.

Our fees are based on the actual cost of delivering the programmes. They are among the lowest in the sector, and compare favourably with those of similar institutions. Fees are published on the website and in other advertising literature in advance of student applications, and will normally not change during the admission process. In the unusual event that a change is necessary, prospective students will be informed and will have the opportunity to withdraw the application, with the refund of all monies already paid. We are also committed to abiding by all Consumer Protection and Contract legislation.



We will endeavour to offer programmes as advertised. Where changes are inevitable, these will be kept to a minimum, and students and prospective students will be fully informed. We will also ensure that where modules are withdrawn, students are fully aware of options available.

Our annual accounts include details of income and expenditure. These are available for public scrutiny. The staffing and running costs of OCRPL are also clearly indicated. This includes a contribution towards the cost of maintaining the campus, and for staff paid. The income from student fees is also clearly stated.

We are committed to employing teaching staff who are well-qualified, and offer good quality teaching. We also encourage the research interests of staff, in order to ensure that their subject knowledge is at the cutting edge of the discipline.

## 6. Freedom of Speech

*The governing body takes such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured within the provider.*

In addition to allowing academic freedom, OCRPL is committed to the principle of freedom of speech within the law. Any speakers invited onto campus will be allowed to express the points of view for which they have been invited, without fear of intimidation. Where those views are controversial, we reserve the right to invite others with opposing points of view, in order to ensure that there is balance between a range of viewpoints.

Staff and students also have the right to freedom of speech within the law, though we expect this to be balanced with respect and tolerance for other viewpoints and sensibilities, and the need to maintain harmonious working relationships within the student and community. More details of what is expected of the staff of OCRPL, including bringing the organisation into disrepute, is set out in the 'Staff Handbook'.



## 7. Governing Body

*The size, composition, diversity, skills mix, and terms of office of the governing body is appropriate for the nature, scale and complexity of the provider.*

OCRPL is a relatively small institution, and the size of the Senior Leadership Team and Board of Directors (alongside the Senate and Council), is adequate for the smooth running of the organisation.

The Principal and Academic Dean/Head of Academic Provision (who is also a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy) have substantial experience and expertise in running an Academic institution. And, with the support of the Board of Directors, who come from a range of church backgrounds, together with the input of appropriately qualified staff, including accountants, HR, operations, maintenance, and where necessary solicitors, we are satisfied that the make-up of the Governing Body is appropriate for effective governance.

The governance of OCRPL is also considered by our partner Universities, when entering into a Partnership Agreement.

## 8. Fit and Proper

*Members of the governing body, those with senior management responsibilities, and individuals exercising control or significant influence over the provider, are fit and proper persons.*

Directors of OCRPL are required to complete an HM Revenue and Customs 'fit and proper persons' declaration', and OCRPL returns a 'Trustee Eligibility declaration' to the Charity Commission. The procedure relating to disqualification of Directors and Directors' disclosure of interests and conflict of interest is set out in the Articles of Association of Assemblies of OCRPL.

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Accountability is to appropriate regulatory bodies, and also to the wider affiliation of Christian charities, which is responsible for approving and confirming the appointment of Directors.

As part of our application for specific course designation we provide details of Directors of OCRPL and of the Accountable Officer, detailing information about other directorships and trusteeships. Because of the nature and ethos of OCRPL, we expect all members of staff, and especially those who serve on the Senior Leadership Team, to demonstrate high levels of personal and professional honesty and integrity. Staff are accountable through line-managers and ultimately to the Directors, acting on behalf of OCRPL. Appropriate conduct is set out in the 'Staff Handbook'.