



# Managing Confidentiality

For the purpose of this document, “committee” refers to any governance or decision-making body with membership from both students and staff. This may include, but is not limited to: working groups, steering groups, councils, and boards.

While you are participating in University governance and decision-making, from time to time items will be raised that are confidential and/or sensitive in nature. Learning how to manage confidentiality is also a skill that you need for your career beyond University. In carrying out your roles, you must make sure that you do not disclose or discuss information with anyone who is not authorised to know it. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are upholding the standards of integrity and confidentiality that are appropriately expected in each situation.

## Confidentiality in Governance

Transparency, accountability, and openness are important principles in governance, but there are many situations where upholding confidentiality is appropriate and may even be required by University policy or by law. For example, personal details of students or staff members, employment contracts, academic records, sensitive data, and commercial proposals are all examples of information that is confidential. Confidential information will usually be labelled specifically, and some decision-making groups always have an expectation of confidentiality.

As well as protecting personal and commercial privacy, confidentiality encourages open and frank discussions in meetings. The ability to talk through ideas without prejudice enables more authentic discussions. Even if a meeting discussion isn't marked as explicitly confidential, it is a matter of professional courtesy to treat opinions and ideas voiced by committee members discreetly and avoid sharing information outside of a professional context by engaging in gossip or having discussions in public places.

Breaches of confidentiality can occur when someone willfully reveals information to an unauthorised third party, but is also possible to breach confidentiality by mistake.

## Data Integrity and Privacy

Part of managing confidentiality also includes making sure that you are a good custodian of documents and that you deal with materials in a secure way. It also means ensuring that you attend any virtual meetings from private locations where you will not be overheard.

You should never leave confidential documentation in places where unauthorised people can find them. Printed materials should be stored where only you can access them, and digital materials should be password protected and never accessed on shared devices.

Even if the people who might be able to hear are not interested in the information, e.g. your parents, housemates, or your kids, it is good professional practice to avoid this. You should never virtually attend a confidential meeting in a public place such as the student lounge or computer pools.

## Good practice:

- Plan ahead and ensure you can attend virtual meetings from a private place where you won't be overheard.
- Remove files from your devices when you no longer need them and dispose of physical copies securely.
- Ask yourself, “would I have access to this information if I was not a member of this committee?” If no, it is probably confidential. If you're not sure, ask the Chair.

## Things to avoid:

- Never discuss confidential information with or within earshot of someone who is not authorised to know it.
- Never send confidential papers to public printers.
- Never gossip about confidential matters.