

Communications and Political Engagement Policy

Lead Officer (Post):	Vice Principal
Responsible Office/Department:	Corporate Communications: Senior Management Team (SMT)
Responsible Committee:	Operations and Estates / SMT
Review Officer (Post):	Principal
Date policy approved:	17 March 2026
Date policy last reviewed and updated:	N/A
Date policy due for review:	1 March 2029
Date of Equality Impact Assessment:	N/A
Date of Privacy Impact Assessment:	N/A

Accessible versions of this policy are available upon request.

Policy Summary

Overview	This document will detail the 2026-2029 Communications and Political Engagement Policy for UHI Shetland.
Purpose	This document will provide clarity over political engagement in line with <i>Code of Good Governance for Scotland's Colleges (2025–26)</i> and <i>OSCR Guidance: Charities and Political Campaigning</i> .
Scope	This policy applies to all staff, contractors, office holders, and volunteers acting on behalf of the College, including senior executives and Board members.

Consultation	Operations and Estates, Senior Management Group (SMG), SMT, Local Negotiation and Consultation Committee (LNCC), Audit Committee
Implementation and Monitoring	This policy will be implemented in line with UHI Shetland policies and available to view on staff communication tools and will be monitored by the Vice Principal.
Risk Implications	Risk: Reputation Risk: Compliance
Link with Strategy	Our Vision: UHI Shetland will be an inspirational hub of innovation and learning designed to meet the needs of the people of Shetland, nationally and internationally. Our Values: UHI Shetland will achieve our Vision by: • Working together - Fostering activity and interaction across the organisation and between staff and students. • Working for Shetland - Addressing skills needs, supporting innovation and applied research for the Shetland economy as the university for Shetland, with the University for the Highlands and Islands (UHI). • Working sustainably - Embedding sustainability in the curriculum and in our practice. • Working to become resilient - Encouraging staff development and aspiration, exploring and achieving new income streams. Working with partners - Developing relationships with employers, schools, communities, SIC and relevant national and international institutions.

1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 Colleges must remain politically neutral, protect their reputation, and communicate responsibly. Staff may engage with political stakeholders only for legitimate institutional purposes and must avoid any action that creates the perception of political endorsement.
- 1.2 Staff and senior leaders must maintain neutrality, uphold governance standards, ensure transparent and balanced political engagement, and follow strict safeguards during election periods. Engagement is allowed when it serves the college's mission, is non-partisan, and is carefully documented. Personal political opinions must not be expressed in official contexts.
- 1.3 We will communicate in keeping with our values; Respect, Openness, Excellence and Collaboration.

2. Definitions

2.1 Political neutrality

Is the commitment by an organisation and its representatives to avoid taking or appearing to take any political stance, ensuring that all decisions, communications, and behaviours are free from political bias.

2.2 Institutional Political Neutrality

The organisation, in its official capacity, must not support, oppose, promote, or endorse any political party, political campaign, or political ideology. This includes refraining from using organisational resources, branding, communication platforms, facilities or events for political purposes.

2.3 Individual Political Neutrality (While Acting in Role)

Employees and representatives are expected to maintain political neutrality when performing their official duties or representing the organisation. This includes not expressing political views in professional settings, not influencing decision-making based on politics, and avoiding conduct that could appear politically partial.

Boundary Between Personal and Professional Political Expression

Employees may engage in political activities privately, outside work, ensuring personal actions are separate from their professional role and do not imply organisational association.

2.4 Political Neutrality in Communications

All internal and external communications must remain objective and factual, avoid politically suggestive language, avoid sharing political messages, and ensure official channels are used strictly for organisational purposes.

3. Purpose

3.1 Political neutrality

The College must not endorse or oppose any political party or candidate and must be seen to be independent of party politics.

3.2 Alignment to purpose

Engagement with political stakeholders must advance legitimate institutional purposes (education, skills, community benefit) and be clearly in the College's interests.

3.3 Integrity and accountability

Communications must uphold standards of public conduct, transparency, and responsible stewardship of public funds.

3.4 Reputation

Activities must consider potential reputational risk and maintain public trust.

3.5 Engagement is permitted when it: (a) relates to the College's mission and charitable purposes; (b) is non-partisan; (c) treats stakeholders equitably; and (d) is documented where appropriate.

Procedures and communications protocol is available (detailing engagement and what is permitted and not permitted) and can be found in the Communications and Political Engagement Protocol (accompanying document) and summarised in the Staff Communications Guide 2026.

3.6 Election Period Safeguards

During election periods, additional safeguards apply to avoid any perception of political influence. Staff must take extra care to maintain neutrality, avoid political discussion at work, and ensure communications remain purely operational. Requests for access, visits, or information from political representatives must be managed transparently, with no preferential treatment.

4. Scope

- 4.1 All staff at UHI Shetland, including postgraduate students and researchers. This policy also applies to contractors, office holders, and volunteers acting on behalf of the College, including senior executives and Board members.
- 4.2 This policy applies to all corporate communications at UHI Shetland.

5. Exceptions

There are no exceptions to this policy

6. Notification

This policy and attached protocol will be readily available on the Staff Resources page.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

- 7.1 Principal and Chief Executive: Overall accountability for political engagement and public communications.
- 7.2 Senior Executive Team (Vice Principal): Ensure activities comply with this policy; approve high-risk engagements or events during election periods.
- 7.3 Communications Team: Coordinate media responses, manage visits, ensure balance and neutrality in all communications.
- 7.4 Compliance Co-ordinator: maintain records of visits.
- 7.5 All Staff: Adhere to the rules in Sections 2 and 3 when communicating externally or meeting political stakeholders.

8. Related Policies, Procedures, Guidelines, and Other Resources

- Code of Good Governance for Scotland's Colleges (2025–26)
- OSCR Guidance: Charities and Political Campaigning.
- UHI Social Media Policy POL068

- UHI Shetland Marketing Policy
- UHI Shetland Marketing Procedure
- UHI Shetland Corporate Communications Policy
- UHI Shetland Staff Communications Guide
- UHI Staff policies and procedures

10. Version Control and Change History

Version	Date	Approved by	Amendment(s)	Author
0	29/01/26	Audit Committee SMT		Vice Principal Operations