



Social Policy Association Executive: statement of ethics

1 Introduction

This statement sets out the standards of conduct and probity expected of all members of the Social Policy Association (SPA) Executive. It aims to ensure that all Executive members observe the highest standards of propriety and act in the best interests of the SPA at all times.

The Executive has drawn up this statement in line with our commitment to governance as described in the SPA Strategy 2017–2021.¹ In doing so, we have consulted the code of conduct for board members of public bodies drawn up by the Cabinet Office and the Charity Commission guidance for trustees.²

In addition to the elected members of the Executive, this statement applies to all co-opted members and members of subcommittees appointed by the Executive.

Members of the SPA may refer to the Guidelines on Research Ethics³ for support in identifying and addressing the different kinds of ethical issues that could arise in the conduct of social policy research.

2 Key principles

The key principles upon which this statement is based are inclusiveness, openness, integrity and transparency.

2.1 Inclusiveness

Executive members should treat one another, and others they come into contact with when working in their role, with respect and courtesy at all times and seek to promote equality and diversity.

2.2 Openness

Executive members should be open, responsive and accountable to one another and other members of the SPA about their decisions, actions and work, including their use of SPA resources.

2.3 Integrity

Executive members should use their knowledge, expertise and experience to take the best decisions they can in the interests of the SPA. They are equally responsible for all decisions

of the Executive Committee. Executive members should also promote and support the principles of good governance by leadership and example and should act in an individual capacity and not as a representative of any group or individual.

2.4 Transparency

Executive members should be as open as possible about the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and submit themselves to appropriate scrutiny by the SPA membership.

3 General responsibilities of Executive members

Executive Members are responsible for upholding the values and principles of the SPA and for contributing their personal skills, knowledge and experience to the work of the Executive.

All elected members are expected to play a full and active role in the work of the Executive – fulfilling their duties and responsibilities responsibly, acting in good faith and in the best interests of the SPA at all times. In addition, they must comply with any statutory or administrative requirements relating to their position.

Executive members should deal with SPA members and their affairs fairly, efficiently, promptly, effectively and sensitively, to the best of their ability. They must not act in a way that unjustifiably favours or discriminates against particular individuals or interests.

Unless prior agreement has been obtained from the Chair, Executive members should not speak on a public platform or in the media as representatives of the SPA. Where Executive members speak on a public platform in other capacities, they must ensure that there is no reasonable possibility that their comments could be seen to be attributed to, or represent the view of, the SPA.

Executive members should endeavour to attend all Executive meetings. An Executive member may be removed from office if he/she is absent from three or more meetings in any twelve month period, unless the absence is due to illness or some other reason approved by the Chair.

4 Financial stewardship

The Executive will fulfil a duty of prudence, acting responsibly, reasonably and honestly to:

- make sure the SPA's assets are only used in support of the SPA's core purposes,
- avoid exposing the SPA's assets, beneficiaries or reputation to undue risk,
- not over-commit the SPA in terms of its finances, always maintaining a reserve that is equal to at least its entire annual income,
- take special care when investing or borrowing, prioritising, where possible, ethical banking and investments.

5 Members' interests

Where an Executive member has a private financial or non-financial interest which might influence, or be perceived to influence, their judgement, a conflict of interest may arise. They must ensure that no conflict arises, or could reasonably be perceived to arise, between their duties as Executive members and their private interests – financial or otherwise.

As a minimum, Executive members should publicly declare any private interests which may, or may be perceived to, conflict with their Executive duties. They must also remove themselves from the discussion or determination of matters in which they have a financial interest. In matters in which they have a non-financial interest, they should not participate in the discussion or determination of a matter where the interest might suggest a risk of bias.

6 Gifts and hospitality

Executive members should not accept or offer a gift, hospitality or any other benefit as a reward, either for doing or not doing something in their official capacity, or for showing advantage to someone or to an organisation. They must not accept any gifts or hospitality which might, or might reasonably appear to, compromise their personal judgement or integrity or place them under an improper obligation.

Gifts of cash should always be refused. Gifts of a trivial nature or minor seasonal items such as calendars or diaries may be accepted. Hospitality is defined as meals or functions such as cocktail parties, receptions, presentations, and invitations to social, cultural and sporting events. It includes overnight accommodation and travel to and from a venue at which the event is held. Hospitality does not include light refreshments, working lunches or meals provided at conferences, particularly if the SPA Executive has paid for attending such events.

Executive members should inform the Executive Chair or Secretary of any offer of gifts or hospitality and ensure that, where a gift or hospitality is accepted, this is recorded in line with the rules set by the Executive Committee. Notification should be made within 90 days of receipt of the gift or hospitality.

Members are responsible for their decisions on the acceptance of gifts or hospitality and for ensuring that any gifts or hospitality accepted can stand up to scrutiny and do not bring the SPA into disrepute.

7 Discussions outside meetings

An Executive member may consult external colleagues or advisers on any issue to be discussed by the Executive in advance of meetings, but should make clear in any discussion that decisions can only be made by the Executive as a whole in open session. Executive members should not give those advising them the impression that views expressed will carry any more weight than views expressed by others, and members must reach their own view of matters at the Executive meeting having heard all the arguments. If Executive Members wish to discuss specific papers with others prior to wider publication of those papers, they should ensure that those whom they consult are made aware of the status of papers and the information they contain (for example, where research results are preliminary rather than

final). Executive members are responsible for the acts of any person whom they consult and should therefore ensure that they are made aware of the draft, sensitive or confidential nature of any information and behave accordingly.

Executive members should treat papers for Committee Meetings, and other information circulated only to Executive members, as confidential unless they are told otherwise. Confidential texts are not for discussion outside the SPA Executive membership. Executive members must take responsibility for the safe keeping of such information.

8 Collective responsibility

The Executive will take collective responsibility for its decisions. Executive members are therefore expected, if questioned on a matter on which the Executive has taken a view, to represent the views of the Executive. If Executive members are questioned on a matter that falls within the remit of the SPA but on which the Executive has not taken a view, they are free to give their own personal view but should stress that this does not necessarily represent the view of the Executive.

9 Relationships with other organisations

Committee members should seek to maintain good relationships with all funding and professional agencies in order to advance the aims of the Social Policy Association, as stipulated in the SPA constitution, and to avoid bringing the wider social policy community into disrepute with these agencies.

Members of the Executive will act in accordance with the motion passed at the 2017 Annual General Meeting:

The SPA recognises the significant role of think tanks as research organisations and communicators with the public and politics in relation to all areas of social policy. However, many think tanks are not transparent in relation to their sources of funding in the ways which are now properly required of academics and others, especially in relation to publication. The SPA asserts that think tanks which are not transparent in relation to funding should be transparent and should not be regarded as ethical contributors to public information and debate.

(Agreed by SPA Executive, April 2018)

Notes

¹ <http://www.social-policy.org.uk/spa-strategy-2017-2021/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-conduct-for-board-members-of-public-bodies>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-cc3/the-essential-trustee-what-you-need-to-know-what-you-need-to-do>

³ http://www.social-policy.org.uk/downloads/SPA_code_ethics_jan09.pdf