

The importance of defining University values: behaviour statements

Values are brief words or phrases and summarise a lot of meaning

One of the key features of useful organisational Value sets is that they are memorable. The many shades of thought and belief captured during the Values consultation and discussion process will have been clustered and consolidated to capture its essence in a few short statements or value headings. This is a very useful and necessary process. It is essential to capture the essence of shared belief or we would never reach the stage where we could easily communicate, or reinforce our Values.

However, on their own, Value statements or labels are unlikely to affect change. They are simply too high level and too abstract to be easily – or consistently – used to direct or inform policy or behaviour.

If the meaning of values is not clarified people will diverge in their interpretations

In the absence of further guidance people will naturally generate their own personal (or departmental) interpretation of the University Values. The simpler the statement/label the greater the number of possible interpretations there are likely to be. In the worst-case scenario organisational Values may be seen as so abstract they are not considered at all and indeed viewed as just another marketing tool, of no direct relevance to the individual or their daily working lives.

Making values meaningful and useful

To ensure that everyone understands what is meant by the University Values and to support their practical use in culture change it is necessary to provide an additional layer of interpretation. This needs to be something that is still easy to use but that provides enough clarity to ensure that behaviours and decisions can be aligned, measured and judged against it. Behaviour statements are a tried and tested mechanism for providing that clarity.

Behaviour Statements

A Behaviour Statement in this context is a sentence that captures a benchmark behaviour associated with a Value. It ideally describes a behaviour that is aspirational but realistic i.e. behaviours we believe we could achieve on our best days (while recognising that none of us are perfect!)

Statements can be generated at several levels.

The main level will be that of the organisation. These statements will describe the way that those inside, and outside, of the University can expect it to live its values. These statements will guide organisational decision making and allow groups within the University to check the alignment of their local decisions and behaviours. Organisational level statements usually begin with the positive “We will ...”

It can also be very useful to develop statements to guide decisions and behaviours at an individual level. The more personally (or organisationally) relevant any statement is the greater chance it has of being a valuable guide and check.

Example of Behaviour Statements from Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU)

Organisational Behaviours

GCU, like very many organisations, has adopted the value of **Integrity** and accordingly the behaviour statements relating to honesty and accountability are fairly standard. In line with its Mission ‘For the Common Good’ however the value of Integrity is also clarified as meaning that GCU ‘strives to make a positive difference in the world’. The GCU statements were generated from the initial ground up consultation process that resulted in the selection of the four GCU Values.

Our Values

How we will
conduct ourselves
at work and study

Our core values of **Integrity**, **Creativity**, **Responsibility** and **Confidence** are shared by staff and students and they underpin what we do and how we do it. Our values are the foundations upon which we build collaborative relationships with like-minded partners to deliver our social mission for the common good.

Integrity *We will:*

- Strive to make a positive difference in the world
- Be open and honest in all our dealings
- Treat everyone with dignity and respect
- Be accountable for our actions

Creativity *We will:*

- Challenge ourselves with new problems
- Create space for curiosity, imagination and entrepreneurialism to flourish
- Draw inspiration from working with others and across discipline boundaries
- Continually seek improvement

Responsibility *We will:*

- Take responsibility for our work and study and our environment
- Empower others to be independent contributors
- Own, learn from and grow through, our mistakes
- Comply with all laws and regulations relating to our activities
- Take a whole university approach to physical and mental wellbeing

Confidence *We will:*

- Be proud of our university and its contributions
- Be bold and reach beyond that which is known
- Believe that positive change is within our power to realise
- Nurture self-belief, independence and ambition in others
- Value and share our knowledge and expertise

Figure 1: GCU's Organisational level behaviour statements

Individual level behaviours

These are statements that define the way that a group of people (e.g. all staff, all staff and students, managers, leaders etc.) agree they should live the University values. GCU has adopted 3 levels of individual statements. The first set outline behaviours that everyone within GCU aspires to live to (All staff and students). The second outlines behaviours that all People Managers within the University believe they should adopt and the third outlines behaviours that Strategic Leaders aspire to. There are many links between these levels and the organisational behaviours in recognition that one levels behaviours can affect that of another.

Table1: illustration of the link between layers for an individual GCU behaviour statement under the Value of Integrity

Integrity	
We will strive to make a positive difference in the world	Organisational level
<i>I</i> ensure that the University's mission informs every strategic decision we take <i>I</i> engage with the University's stakeholders in order to co-create solutions	Strategic Leader level
<i>I</i> share and celebrate my team's contributions to the Common Good <i>I</i> encourage and support team members in their efforts to deliver for the Common Good	People Manager level
<i>I</i> believe that <i>I</i> can make a positive difference by what <i>I</i> do as a member of the GCU community	All staff and student level

The GCU individual behaviours were initially drafted and then refined in a year long period of iterative, and largely online, consultation with the staff groups concerned¹.

¹ The GCU approach to individual behaviours was modelled on the one [used with great success by Guys & St Thomas's Health Trust](#) several years prior to our development. Thanks & acknowledgements to the GSTT OD group for their help & support.

