

# Public sector ethics

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## Public Sector Ethics Act

The *Public Sector Ethics Act 1994* (PSEA) governs ethics and conduct in the Queensland Public Service.

It contains four principles fundamental to good public administration:

1. Integrity and impartiality – being honest, fair and respectful and ensuring decisions are unprejudiced, unbiased and just
2. Promoting the public good – delivering the programs and services that benefit the people of Queensland
3. Commitment to the system of government – respecting the government and its institutions, and upholding the law
4. Accountability and transparency – taking responsible actions and decisions that can be explained and easily understood.

## Queensland Public Service Code of Conduct

### Purpose

The Queensland Public Service Code of Conduct (QPS code) helps ensure that the public service demonstrates the highest ethical standards, consistent with a robust system of public sector integrity and accountability.

According to the PSEA, the purpose of a code is to provide standards of conduct consistent with the ethics principles and values.

## **Application**

The QPS code applies to employees of public service agencies. This includes government departments, TAFE Queensland and the administrative offices of court or tribunals.

All employees are subject to the code. It also applies to volunteers, students, contractors, consultants and any other person who works for a public service agency.

The code applies when officers are carrying out their official duties. This includes representing the government at conferences, training events, business trips and attending work-related social events.

## **Operation**

The QPS code describes how public officials will conduct themselves while delivering services to the Queensland community.

In upholding the code, officials should commit to uphold the intention and spirit of the principles and values.

The code is supported by legislation, awards, certified agreements, directives, whole of government policies and standards and agency policies and procedures.

## **Ethical decision-making hotspots**

The QPS code requires that decision-making is ethical.

For the purposes of the code, ethical decision-making is making the right decision consistent with the PSEA principles and values.

Attend our [Good decision training](#) and learn how to make good decisions, the standards you must uphold and how to maintain proper and accurate records.

## **Recordkeeping**

The QPS code requires compliance with law and agency policies.

Public agencies are required by the *Public Records Act 2002* to make and keep, full and accurate records of their official activities, including decision-making.

Comprehensive, timely and accessible record keeping is central to good decision-making.

## **Conflicts of interests**

The QPS code requires that agency officers disclose, manage and resolve conflicts of interests.

A conflict of interests involves a conflict between a duty to serve the public interest and personal interests.

A conflict of interests must be resolved in the public interest to ensure the integrity of the decision-making process.

## **Natural justice**

Natural justice is about giving a person who may be affected by a decision a fair hearing before the decision is made.

Generally, a fair hearing involves disclosing the critical issues and adverse information to the affected person, giving the affected person a reasonable opportunity to respond, and an impartial decision-maker.

## **Discretion**

Discretion is a decision-making process where the decision-maker has latitude or choice about the decision.

In exercising discretion, the decision-maker must consider and give appropriate weight to relevant matters/particular circumstances and exclude irrelevant matters.

The decision maker must make up their own mind after individual assessment, and should not be subjected to improper influence or direction.

# Communication

Good communication of decisions is essential to fairness, openness and accountability. Decision-makers should provide meaningful and accurate reasons and rights of review/appeal for decisions affecting people.

## Training courses

We deliver the following training:

- Complaints management helps officers who deal with complaints, including officers who internally review complaints.
- Good decisions is a program designed to help officers make better decisions. The training is suitable for all public sector decision-makers, including supervisors and managers.
- Managing unreasonable complainant conduct is a half-day course designed to help officers manage unreasonable conduct they may encounter when delivering services to the public.
- Practical ethics for state government is a half-day course designed to help officers assess and respond to ethical dilemmas and understand core government values.
- Practical ethics for local government this interactive half-day course challenges participants with ethical questions in various scenarios that are local government specific.