

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

SUMMARY OF POLICY AND PROCEDURE ON CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This one-page summary is intended to cover the key points of the policy on conflict of interest (Col); the policy in its entirety can be found at: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/researchsupport/integrity/conflict/policy/>. For further information, please visit the Col website (www.admin.ox.ac.uk/researchsupport/integrity/conflict) or contact the Secretary of the Conflict of Interest Committee (coisec@admin.ox.ac.uk).

Who does the policy apply to?

The scope of the policy is broadly defined and applies to all academic and other staff and students, external members of committees, and all others working in the University (including grant holders and emeritus researchers), and staff and directors of University subsidiary companies. A reference in this summary to staff or students includes any person within the scope of the policy.

What is a conflict of interest?

A conflict of interest is any situation in which the personal interests of a staff member or student, or interests that they owe to another body, may (or may *appear* to) influence or affect that person's decision making or influence on a University decision or other activity. Listed below are some scenarios in which a conflict could be perceived (further examples can be found at Appendix A to the policy):

- You are the member of a recruitment panel and an applicant is a member of your spouse's family.
- You are a researcher with a financial interest in the company sponsoring your research (the outcome of which may affect the value of your interest).
- You are taking part in the negotiation of a contract between the University and a company, which is owned by a personal friend.
- You are applying for a studentship, and your supervisor is a member of the panel making decisions about the studentships to be awarded. (In this scenario, both the student and the supervisor should declare an interest.)

As these examples show, interests can be financial and non-financial, and a potential gain can be personal or a benefit to someone with a connection to a member of staff or student. Commitments and obligations can also be compromised.

What should I do if I recognise that I have a conflict of interest?

You have a duty to declare the interest at the time the conflict first arises, or it is recognised that a conflict might be perceived. In a committee meeting, a declaration should be made to the chairman before discussion of the relevant item. Otherwise, a declaration should be made in writing to the relevant person; please see paragraphs 19 - 20 and Appendix B of the policy for details of whom the declaration should be made to.

What will happen once I have declared the interest?

Many situations will require nothing more than a declaration and a brief written record of that declaration. However, in some cases, further action may be necessary. During a committee meeting, the chairman may ask members with a conflict to refrain from participating in the decision on that matter, or leave the meeting for discussion of that item. In other scenarios, a plan of action might need to be agreed in order to manage or avoid the conflict.

I've completed an annual declaration of interests – that's sufficient, isn't it?

The focus of the policy is on the declaration of interests at the time when the conflict first arises, so that steps can be taken to manage the conflict before any decision is made that might be affected by the conflict. With a few exceptions (e.g. for senior officers and Council members) the policy does not require staff to complete annual declarations of interest, although some departments may ask their members to do so. Even if a declaration form is completed, this does not absolve members of staff from declaring a new or previously declared interest at the relevant time.