

Managing Conflicts of Interest (CoI) Policy

The purpose of this policy is to set out how conflicts of interest (CoI) are identified and how they may be managed during the peer review process

Definition of a conflict of interest

A conflict of interest occurs for a reviewer, when your decision might be, or might be perceived to be, influenced (or otherwise affected) by some potential personal benefit arising from your decision. This benefit could be financial, reputational or career-related and includes instances where the benefit would be to any person(s) close to you or towards whom you have some loyalty or responsibility. As a non-exhaustive list of potential examples, a reviewer would report a CoI when they:

- Are a close friend, patient or relative of the applicant;
- Are directly involved in the work that the applicant proposes and/or have contributed to the application;
- Have recently collaborated with the applicant (within the last two years);
- Are currently employed (or similar arrangement) at the same institution as the applicant (or have been within the last two years);
- Are a close collaborator, or provide services to, or have other similar professional relationship(s) with the applicant;
- Have submitted an application to the same round for which you are being asked to provide a review;
- Have already reviewed the proposal at a different funding body (i.e.. 'double jeopardy');
- Have been approached and agreed to be a member of a committee connected with the research project (for example an advisory group or steering committee);
- Are involved in work that could compete with the work that the applicant proposes in their application; or have a commercial or financial/pecuniary interest. For example, if you are part of an organisation that may benefit financially, directly or indirectly, from any decision made.

Managing a conflict : Research Grant Review Committee (RGRC) Members

- Each Research Grant Review Committee (RGRC) member has to be as explicit and transparent as possible when it comes to declaring a CoI. They must declare it in writing, as soon as the conflict is identified or suspected, to the Head of Research and or the Research and Grants Manager
- Where a RGRC member is an applicant or co-applicant on a grant application, he or she must declare an interest and withdraw from assessing any of the applications. They will not receive documents pertaining to the applications, learn the identity of any referees or receive referees' reports. He or she must retire from the part of meeting when the applications are being assessed. This will also apply to trustees who serve as RGRC members and are applicants in the grant round.

- Where the Chair of is an applicant or co-applicant on a grant application, he or she must declare an interest and should not be involved in that session of the meeting. A Vice-Chair will chair the meeting to prevent any undue influence.
- RGRC members who could be seen as a direct competitor of the applicant (e.g. they are funded or applying for funding on a similar project to the proposal under discussion) may be asked to withdraw from the meeting for that application, or may be allowed to stay, but not vote on the application.
- RGRC members should bear in mind that if a) the content of the application is completely outside their area of interest and/or b) they are not acquainted at all with the applicant(s) at their Institution, they may decide not to declare a CoI. However, if the RGRC member does declare an interest, then they may be asked to withdraw from the meeting for that application, or may be allowed to stay, but not vote on the application.
- Meeting papers (including minutes and agendas) and related correspondence, all application documents, and contact and personal details provided as part of an application (including those of external peer reviewers), are to be considered strictly confidential and should not be shared with persons outside of the Committee.
- If a RGRC member (including serving Trustees) is approached by an applicant for technical advice on an application, they may provide advice, but must make a declaration for a potential CoI. They may subsequently be asked by the Chair to absent themselves from future discussions of the application concerned.

Managing a conflict : External Peer Reviewers

- If a CoI is established with the external reviewer prior to receiving the full application they will not be asked to continue reviewing the application and another external reviewer will be sourced.
- If an external reviewer identifies a CoI during the reviewing process they must declare it as soon as they become aware of it, in writing, to the Head of Research and or the Research and Grants manager. If the CoI is established they will be asked to return or delete/destroy any documentation pertaining to that application and will not be involved in any further reviewing of that application.